THE MASK
MAXIMIZED
Sam Kieth · William Messner-Loebs

THE MAXX

MAXIMIZED

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9781623027162

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Originally published as THE MAXX: MAXXIMIZED issues #9–12.

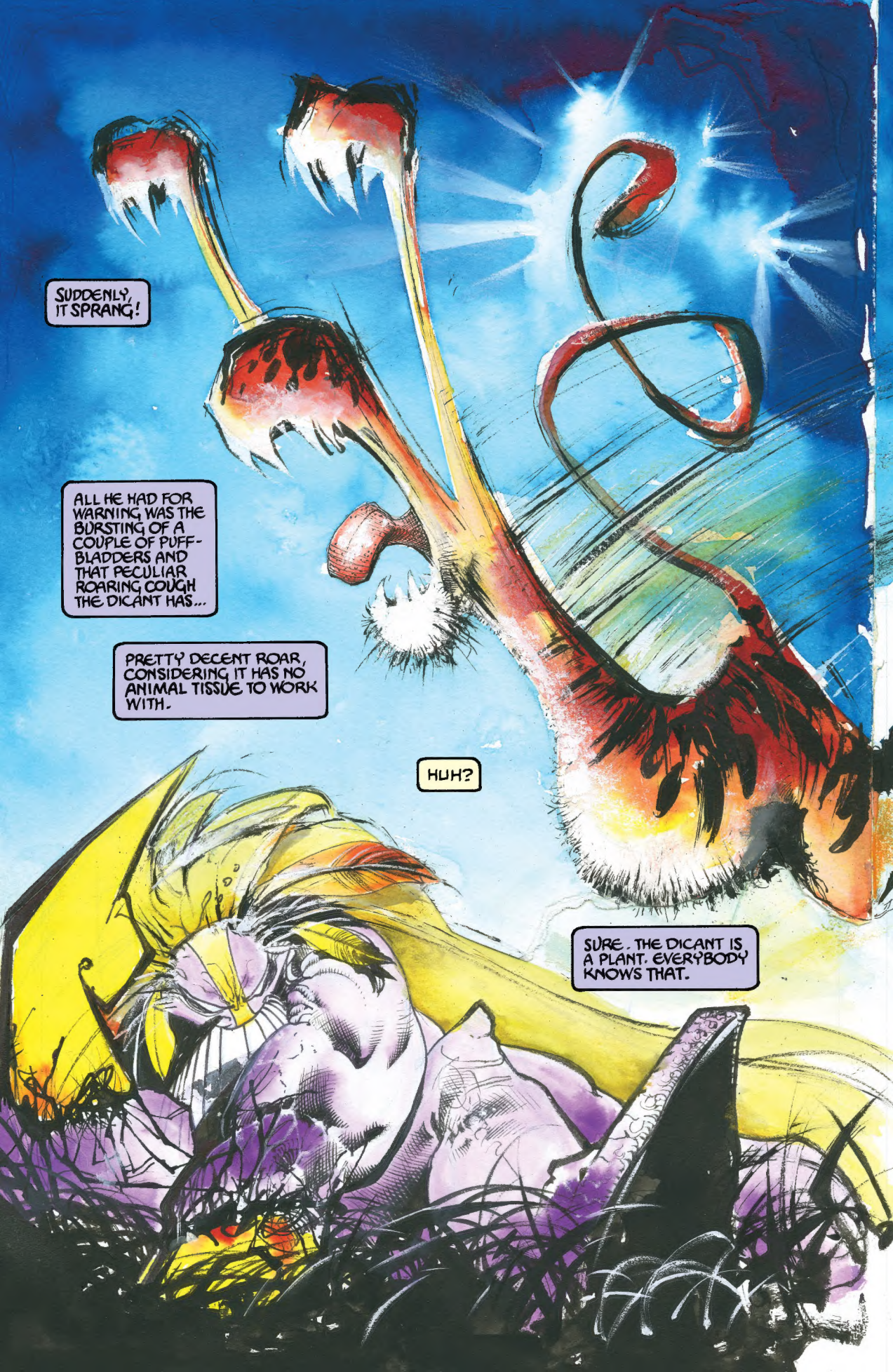
The Maxx
created by
Sam Kieth

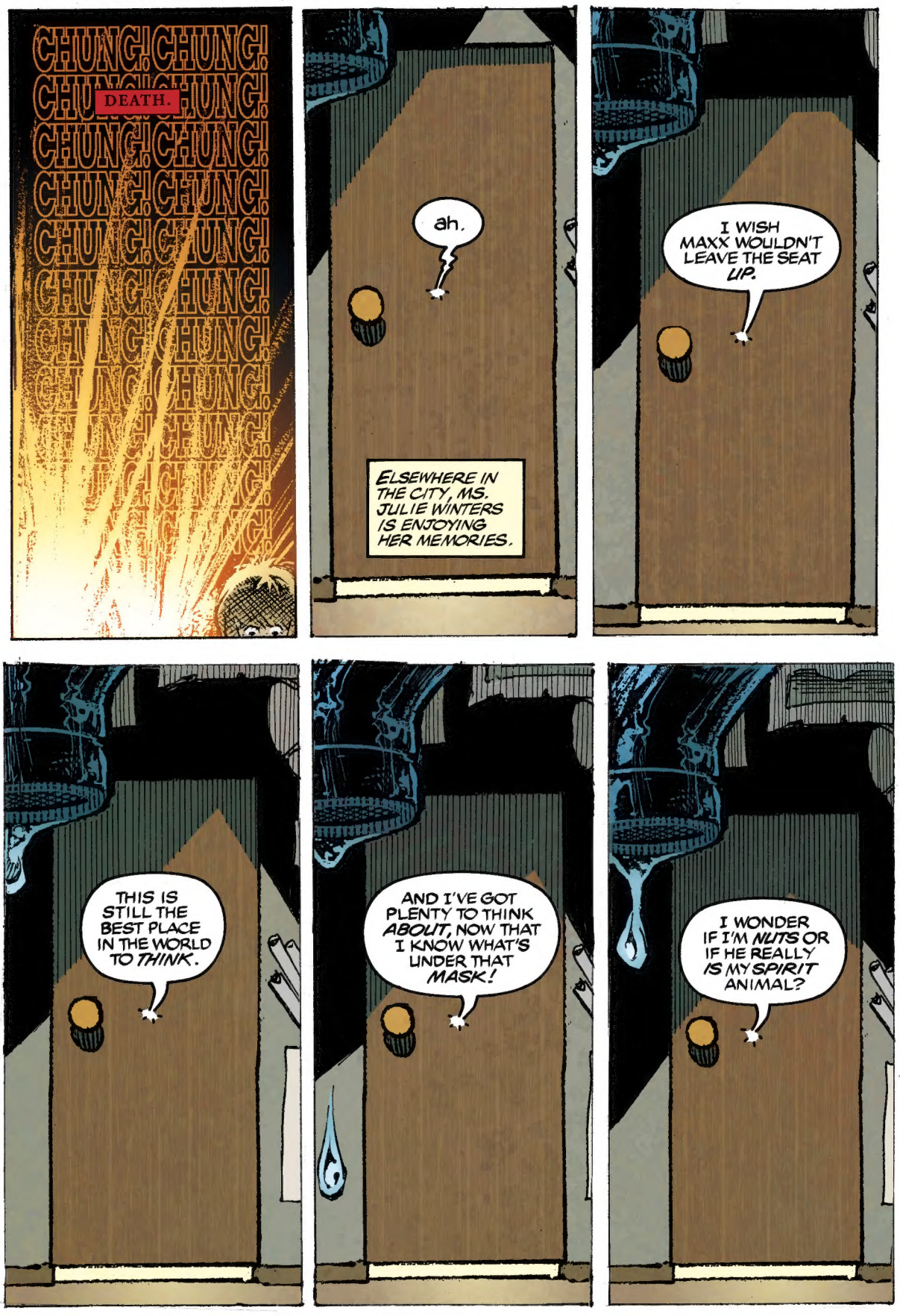
Chapter One

CLICK...WHRRR... THIS IS A RECORDING...
HIYA, DOC.
I SUPPOSE YOU'RE WONDERING WHY YOU'VE BEEN TIED UP, DRAGGED OUT OF THE MORGUE, CARRIED INTO THE BASEMENT OF THE ABANDONED BULLDOG JAR RUBBER FACTORY, THROUGH A BATHROOM DECORATED IN A COW MOTIF, AND ARE PRESENTLY IN THE DARK, SURROUNDED BY DARK BLUE, CANNABILISTIC HOMUNCULI.
EVERYONE DOES.
MEEP
MEEP
MEEP
MEEP
MEEP

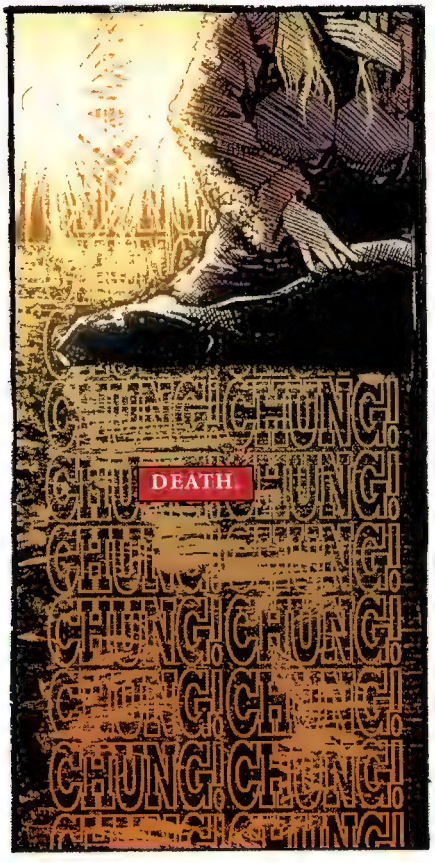
BUT FIRST, LEMMEE TELL YOU ABOUT A COUPLE OF THE OTHER THINGS THAT ARE HAPPENING AROUND THIS WIDE-OPEN, GLORIOUS CITY WE CALL HOME...
GLORIE, ARE YOU COMING BACK TO SCHOOL THIS YEAR?
DUNNO.
THERE'S THERAPY AN' STUFF. I DON'T REALLY FEEL... SAFE ANYWHERE, Y'KNOW? NOT AFTER WHAT HAPPENED AN' ALL...
WHO WOULD? AFTER ALL, YOU WERE MESSED UP PRETTY BAD BY THAT GUY...
MR. GONE. BOY, I WISH I C'D GET HOLD OF THAT SLIMEBALL! I'D *BREAK* HIS *SPINE* JUST LIKE *SHADOWHAWK!*
GRRR! ME TOO!
THANKS, GUYS, BUT...
HE'D JUST KILL YOU. HE'S TOO STRONG. I THOUGHT I WAS TOUGH, BUT I WAS *NOTHING.*

I THINK IT'S TIME FOR A STORY...
A STORY 'BOUT THE MAXX? OH, BOY!
IS THIS ONE GONNA MAKE SENSE?
THEY ALL MAKE SENSE.
AT LEAST TO ME.
ANYWAY, THE MAXX WAS RESTING ON THE VERDANT JUNGLE FLOOR OF THE OUTBACK, ALSO KNOWN AS PANGAEA, THE JUNGLE WORLD, WHEN A DICANT CAME SLINKING OVERHEAD...
A WHAT?
A DICANT! IT'S ONE OF THE MAJOR PREDATORS! WHAT DO THEY TEACH YOU KIDS IN SCHOOL?


SUDDENLY, IT SPRANG!
ALL HE HAD FOR WARNING WAS THE BURSTING OF A COUPLE OF PUFF-BLADDERS AND THAT PECULIAR ROARING COUGH THE DICANT HAS...
PRETTY DECENT ROAR, CONSIDERING IT HAS NO ANIMAL TISSUE TO WORK WITH.
HUH?
SURE. THE DICANT IS A PLANT. EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT.


CHUNG! CHUNG!
CHUNG! CHUNG!
CHUNG! CHUNG!
CHUNG! CHUNG!
CHUNG! CHUNG!
CHUNG! CHUNG!
CHUNG! CHUNG!
CHUNG! CHUNG!
DEATH.
ah.
ELSEWHERE IN THE CITY, MS. JULIE WINTERS IS ENJOYING HER MEMORIES.
I WISH MAXX WOULDN'T LEAVE THE SEAT UP.
THIS IS STILL THE BEST PLACE IN THE WORLD TO THINK.
AND I'VE GOT PLENTY TO THINK ABOUT, NOW THAT I KNOW WHAT'S UNDER THAT MASK!
I WONDER IF I'M NUTS OR IF HE REALLY IS MY SPIRIT ANIMAL?

AS A MUTATED PLANT, THE DICANT DOESN'T HAVE VITAL ORGANS. IT HAS SPINES FOR TEETH AND A TOUGH, RUBBERY SHELL WHICH STRETCHES INSTEAD OF BREAKING.
IT'S AS STRONG AS A PANTHER AND BRIGHT AS CLOVER, AND HAS BROCCOLI'S SPASMS OF KILLING RAGE!
THE MAXX SLASHED IT AGAIN...
AND AGAIN!
AND AGAIN!!
TO NO AVAIL.


CHUNG.CHUNG.
DEATH.
CHUNG.CHUNG.
CHUNG.CHUNG.
CHUNG.CHUNG.
CHUNG.CHUNG.

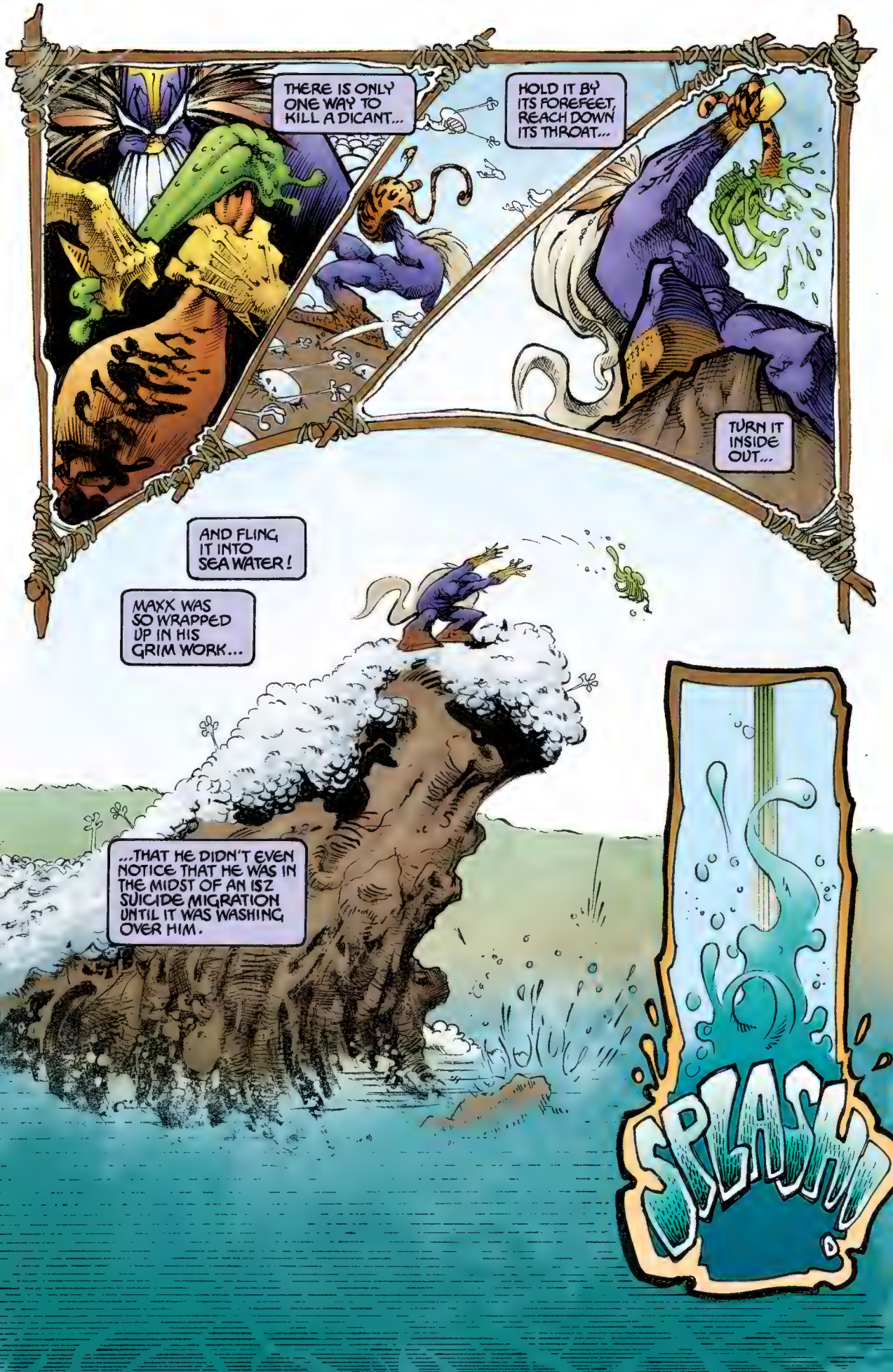
THIS WHOLE THING *IS* NUTS!

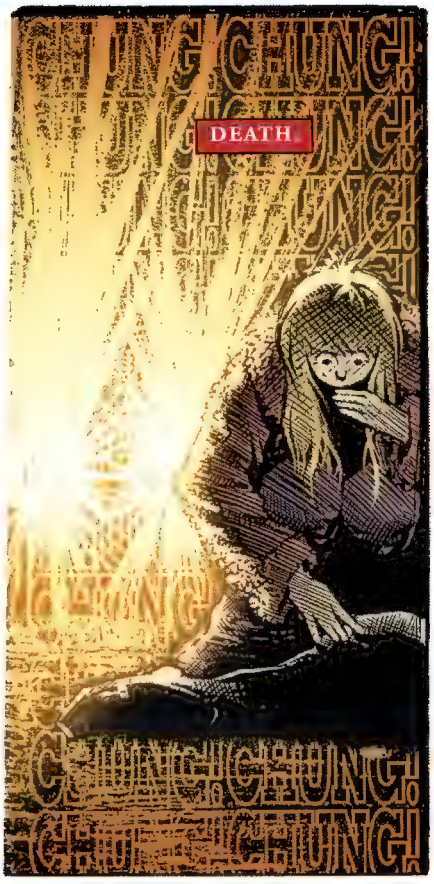
SPIRIT ANIMALS DON'T EXIST!
BUT THEN, HUGE PURPLE-CLAD *SUPER HEROES* AREN'T SUPPOSED TO EXIST EITHER.

AND I'VE BEEN TO THE *OUTBACK*. I'VE SEEN MAXX'S WEIRD WORLD FOR MYSELF.
THAT PSYCHOPATH MR. GONE IMPLIED I CREATED THE OUTBACK... THAT I WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR *EVERY-THING*.

NO NO *NO*... THERE'S *GOT* TO BE A WAY OUT OF THIS! SOME WAY TO...

OH *GREAT!* THERE'S NO *PAPER!*


THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO KILL A DICANT...
HOLD IT BY ITS FOREFEET, REACH DOWN ITS THROAT...
TURN IT INSIDE OUT...
AND FLING IT INTO SEA WATER!
MAXX WAS SO WRAPPED UP IN HIS GRIM WORK...
...THAT HE DIDN'T EVEN NOTICE THAT HE WAS IN THE MIDST OF AN ISZ SUICIDE MIGRATION UNTIL IT WAS WASHING OVER HIM.
SPLASH!


CHUNG CHUNG
DEATH
CHUNG CHUNG
CHUNG CHUNG

THAT THING I SAW BEHIND THE MASK WASN'T MAXX.
NOT THE MAXX I KNOW, ANYWAY.

BUT WHAT WAS IT?

IF IT WAS SOME SPIRIT-BUNNY PART OF MYSELF, WOULDN'T I RECOGNIZE IT?
MAYBE I'M SO SCREWED UP, I WOULDN'T EVEN KNOW MY OWN SPIRIT ANIMAL IF IT BIT ME IN THE ASS!

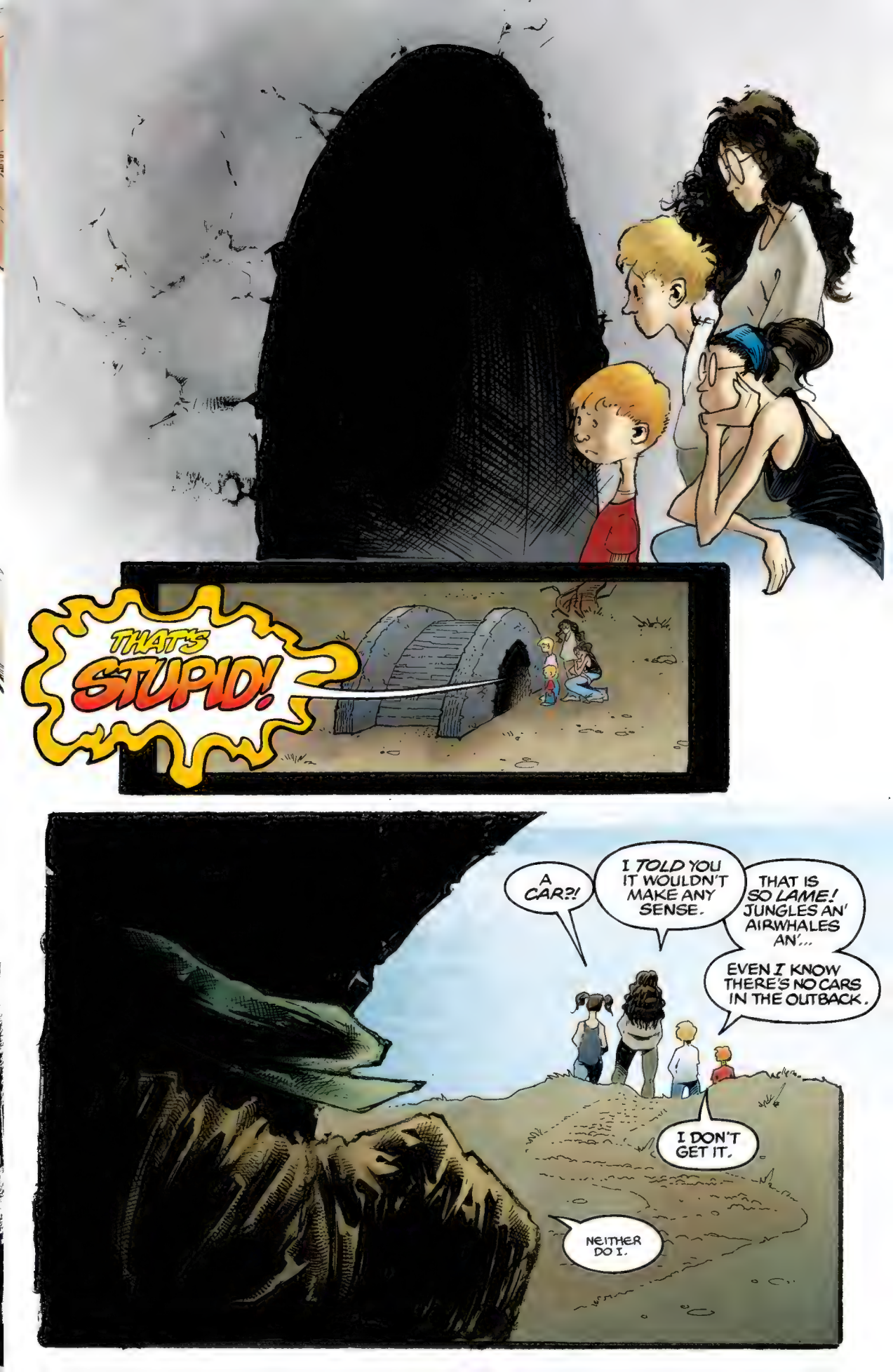
MAYBE I'M NOT SO SCREWED UP.
AND MAYBE THE TOILET PAPER SPIRIT WILL SHOW UP AND HAND ME SOME FRESH TOILET PAPER.

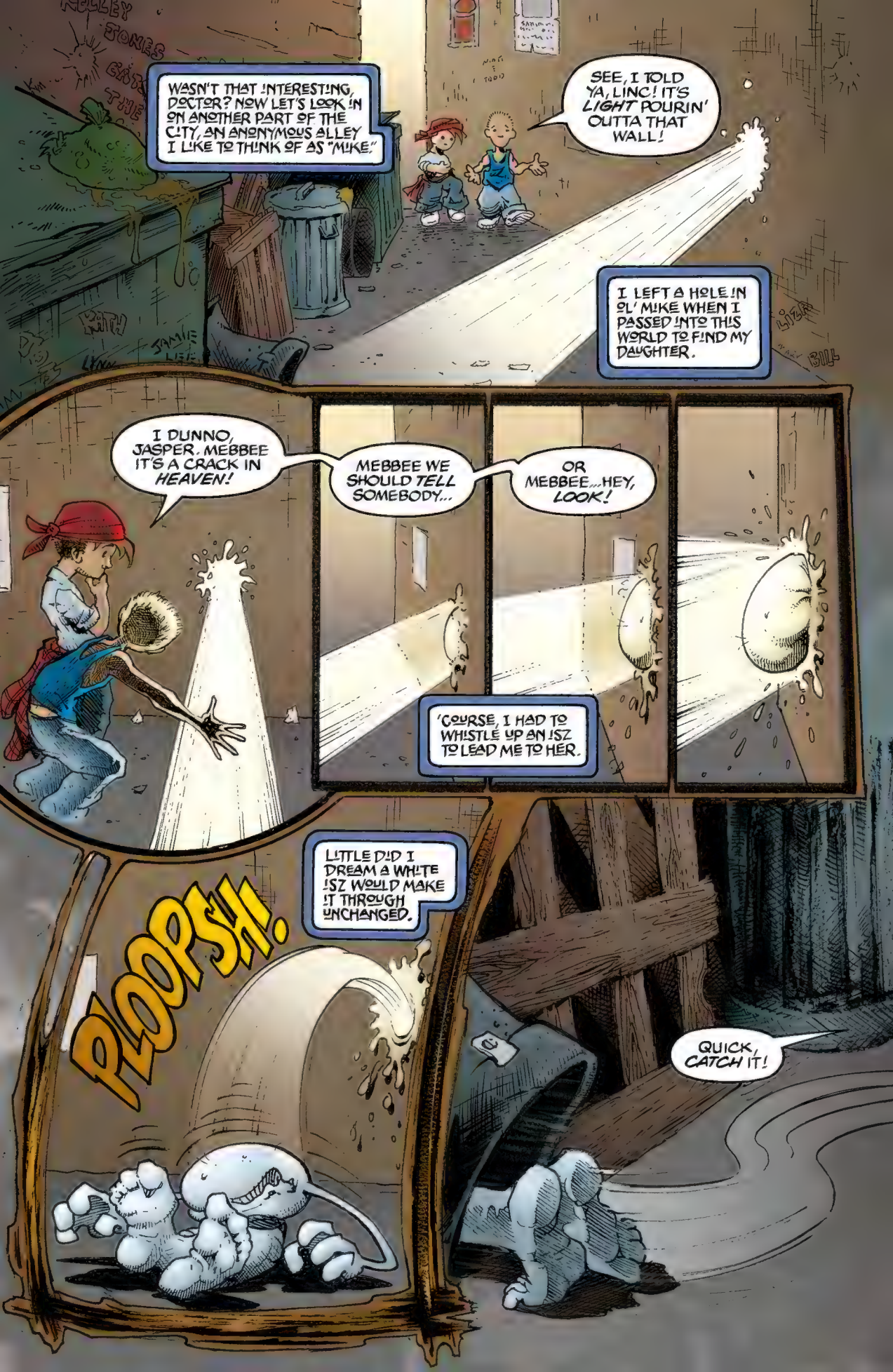
AAH, I PROBABLY DON'T EVEN HAVE A TOILET PAPER SPIRIT.

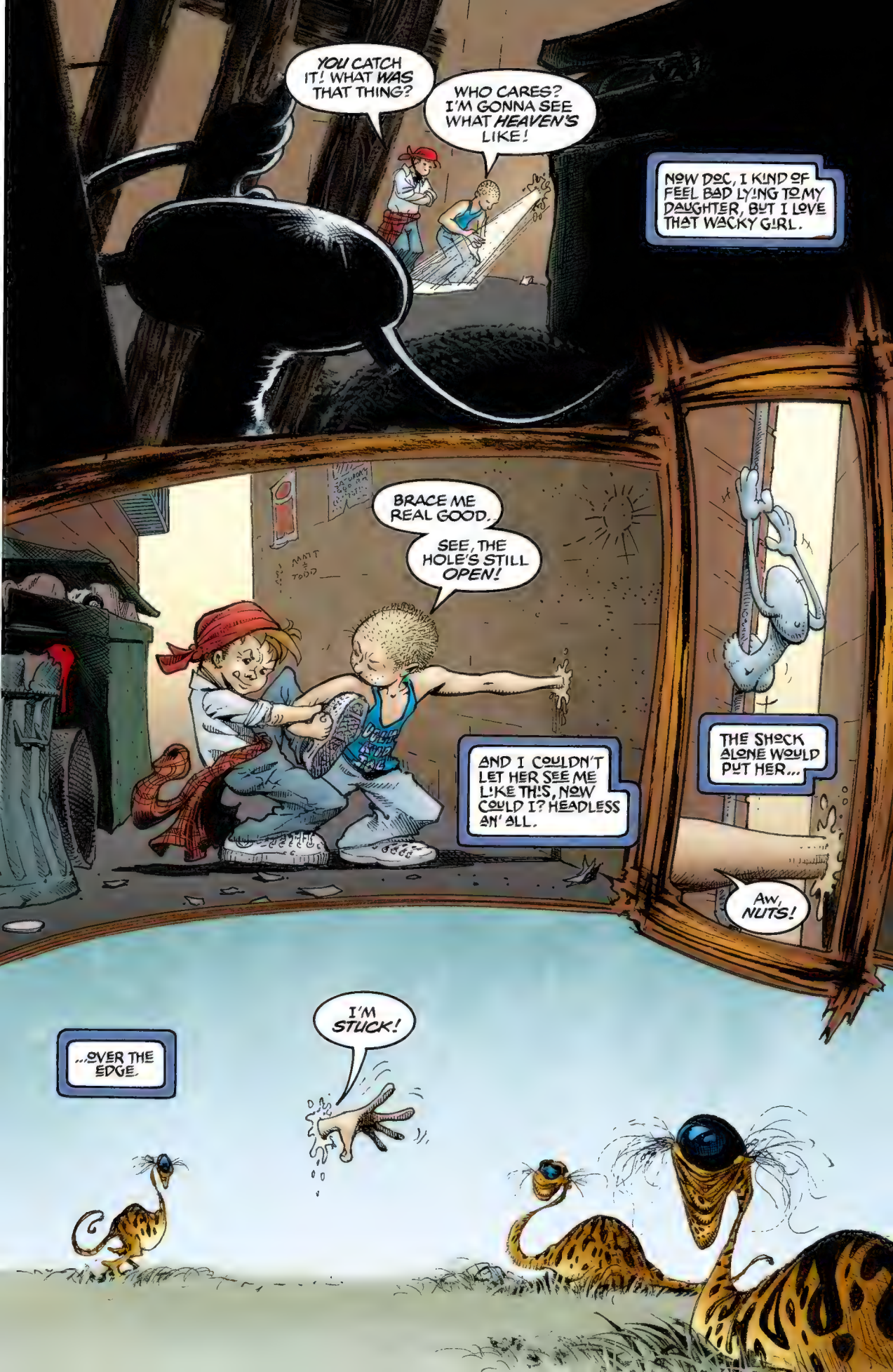
FOR A MOMENT MAXX WAS DISORIENTED. THEN HE REALIZED THAT HE HAD WANDERED INTO AN ISZ FIELD.
A BREEDING GROUND WHERE THE UNRIPE ISZ LIVE, FATTENING ON THE UNWARY...
...UNTIL THEY BREAK FREE IN A WAVE AND BEGIN THEIR LONG, DESTRUCTIVE MARCH TO THE SEA.
THEN HE SAW THE "MOUNTAINS THAT WALK."
CALLED "EMWITABWAY," OR "WALKING MOUNTAINS," THESE HUGE GUARDIANS ARE THE SLAVES OF THE SEEDBRINGERS. THEY KEEP CRABBITS AND FESTERMOLES FROM DINING ON UNRIPENED ISZ FLESH.
THEY ARE MANIACALLY STRONG AND FIERCELY LOYAL...
AND THEY KNOW ONLY ONE SONG.

THANK GOD FOR PAPER TOWELS.
Y'KNOW... LEAVING ASIDE THIS *BUNNY* STUFF... WHAT DO I REALLY KNOW ABOUT THE REAL-LIFE MAXX?
PRACTICALLY *NOTHING*. HE'S A TOTAL MYSTERY. HE COULD BE A *KILLER* FOR ALL I KNOW.
IT DOESN'T *FEEL* LIKE HE'S DANGEROUS...BUT I DON'T TRUST MY INSTINCTS ANYMORE.
THE SAD THING IS THAT FROM THE MINUTE MAXX PUT THE *MASK* ON, I'VE BEEN CONFUSING HIM WITH ALL MY BUNNY STUFF.
GOD, OUR RELATIONSHIP IS *SO TWISTED*. I'M NOT SURE WE CAN *EVER* REALLY UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER LIKE NORMAL PEOPLE.
I GUESS IT'S JUST A BUST.
I DON'T LIKE WHERE THIS IS GOING...AND NEITHER WILL HE.

THE EMWITABWAY TURNED TOWARDS HIM. THEIR EVERY MOVEMENT WAS RIPE WITH ANGER.
THEY WEREN'T SMART ENOUGH TO HAVE MORE THAN ONE EMOTION AT A TIME.
SUDDENLY, SOMETHING DROVE UP FROM UNDER THE ISZ AND PLOWED RIGHT AT THE MAXX.
THE ISZ FELL AWAY AND MAXX SAW IT CLEARLY.
HE WAS TRAPPED.
WHAT WAS IT?
WHAT HAPPENED?
WAS IT A GIANT SEUSSADON?
IT WAS A BUICK.


THAT'S STUPID!
A CAR?!
I TOLD YOU IT WOULDN'T MAKE ANY SENSE.
THAT IS SO LAME! JUNGLES AN' AIRWHALES AN'...
EVEN I KNOW THERE'S NO CARS IN THE OUTBACK.
I DON'T GET IT.
NEITHER DO I.


WASN'T THAT !NTEREST!NG, DOCTOR? NOW LET'S LOOK !N ON ANOTHER PART OF THE C!TY, AN ANONYMOUS ALLEY I L!KE TO TH!NK OF AS "M!KE."
SEE, I TOLD YA, LINC! IT'S LIGHT POURIN' OUTTA THAT WALL!
I LEFT A HOLE !N OL' M!KE WHEN I PASSED !NTO TH!S WORLD TO F!ND MY DAUGHTER.
I DUNNO, JASPER. MEBBEE IT'S A CRACK IN HEAVEN!
MEBBEE WE SHOULD TELL SOMEBODY...
OR MEBBEE... HEY, LOOK!
'COURSE, I HAD TO WH!STLE UP AN !SZ TO LEAD ME TO HER.
L!TTLE D!D I DREAM A WH!TE !SZ WOULD MAKE !T THROUGH UNCHANGED.
PLOOPSH!
QUICK, CATCH IT!


YOU CATCH IT! WHAT WAS THAT THING?
WHO CARES? I'M GONNA SEE WHAT HEAVEN'S LIKE!
NOW DOC, I KIND OF FEEL BAD LYING TO MY DAUGHTER, BUT I LOVE THAT WACKY GIRL.
BRACE ME REAL GOOD.
SEE, THE HOLE'S STILL OPEN!
AND I COULDN'T LET HER SEE ME LIKE THIS, NOW COULD I? HEADLESS AN' ALL.
THE SHOCK ALONE WOULD PUT HER...
AW, NUTS!
...OVER THE EDGE.
I'M STUCK!

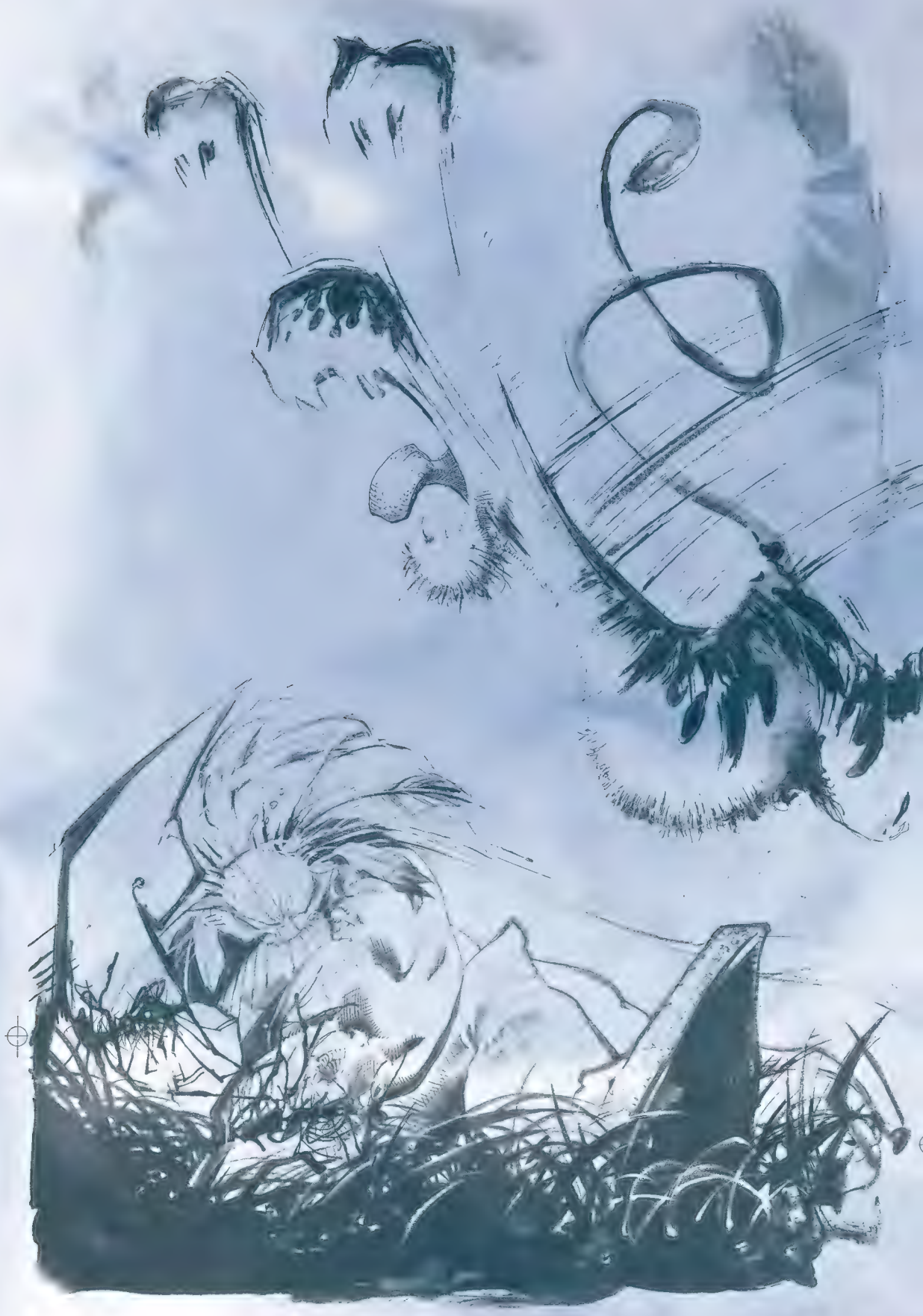
TCH TCH! ANOTHER ATTEMPT BY MODERN MAN TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL WORLDS DOOMED TO FAILURE. LET'S SEE WHAT THAT WHITE ISZ IS UP TO!
THE POOR LITTLE BLIND GUY'S TREMBLING. NO WONDER, HE'S AFRAID. THIS WORLD'S COMPLETELY FOREIGN TO HIM!
EXCELLENT! IT IS RIGHT AT JULIE'S WINDOW! I CAN FEEL IT!
UNFORTUNATELY, ONLY ONE WHITE ISZ WAS CLOSE ENOUGH TO RESPOND TO MY INTERDIMENSIONAL MENTAL WHISTLE.
THE BLACK ISZES ARE SO MUCH SMARTER!
WELL, WE DO WHAT WE CAN!

NOTE THE WHITE ISZ SPIES UPON OUR HEROINE, AS MS. WINTERS IS ABOUT TO SAY...
EWWWW. THIS IS IT, ALL RIGHT. AND IT REALLY SMELLS PUTRID.
GEEZ. DID I BRING A CARTON OF FISH HOME AND FORGET TO REFRIGERA IT? HOW STUPID.
Uh, JULIE. THERE'S SOMETHING I GOTTA TELL YOU...
HI, SARAH. WHAT'S UP?
WELL... SEE, THERE WAS THIS... CLAY...
YOU DIDN'T BUY A BIG BOX OF MEAT AND LEAVE IT HERE, DID YOU?
NO, OF COURSE NOT. WHY WOULD YOU? NEVER MIND.

LET'S CRACK THIS BABY OPEN AND LEARN THE BAD NEWS!
SEE, I WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT MY SPIRIT ANIMAL...
WHAT ARE YOU BABBLING ABOUT, SARAH?
um...
IT'S ALL MY FAULT...

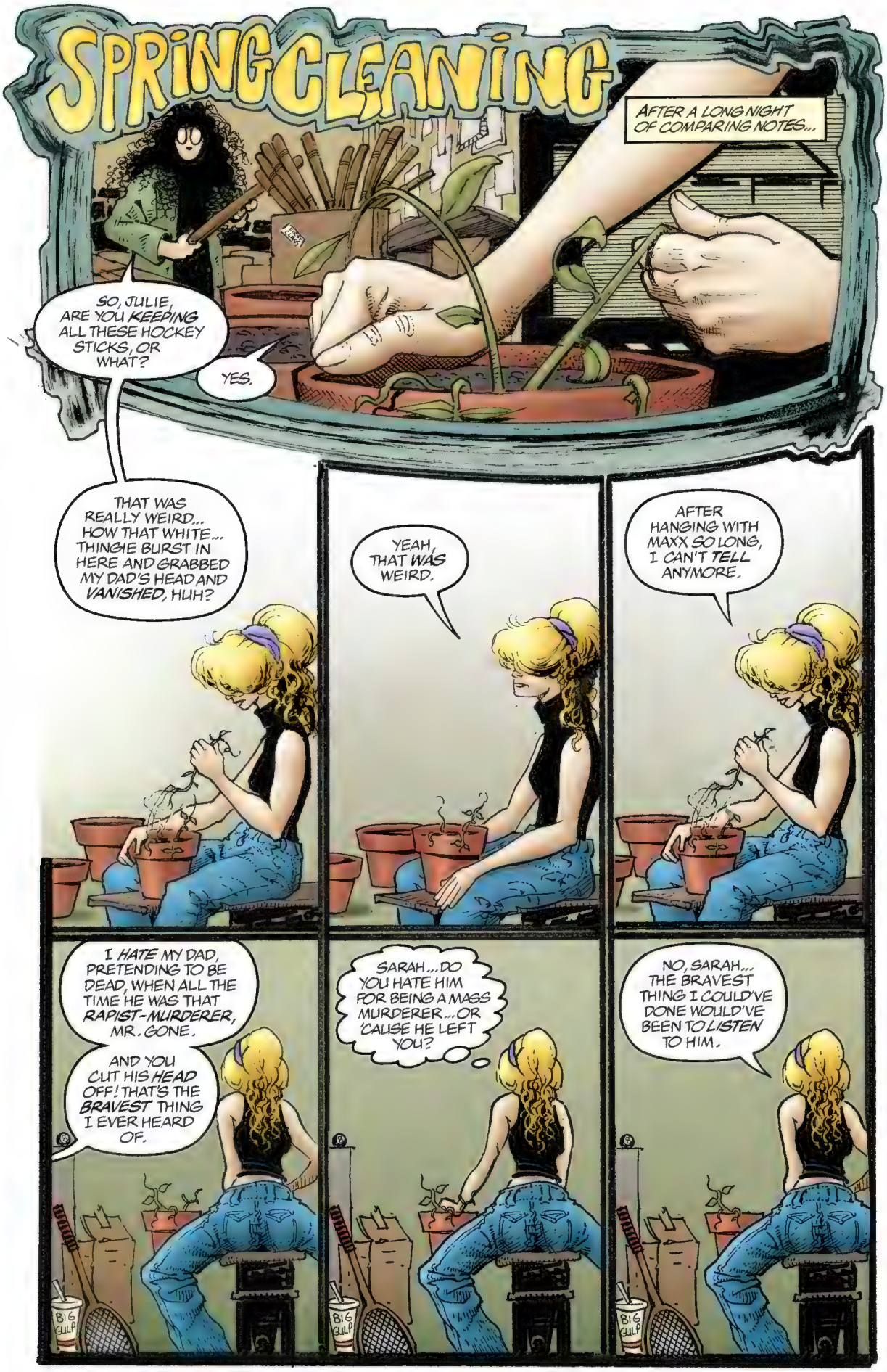
JULIE, WAIT! DON'T TOUCH IT!
IT'S SOME KINDA TRAP. I KNOW IT!
SARAH, HAVE YOU GONE BONKERS? I...
OOPS!
RRRRRRRRRR
KKOOOOOLLLLL
SPLAK
GOLLY... IT'S HORRIBLE!
IT'S DISGUSTING!
IT'S... IT'S... JUST MY...

...DAD.

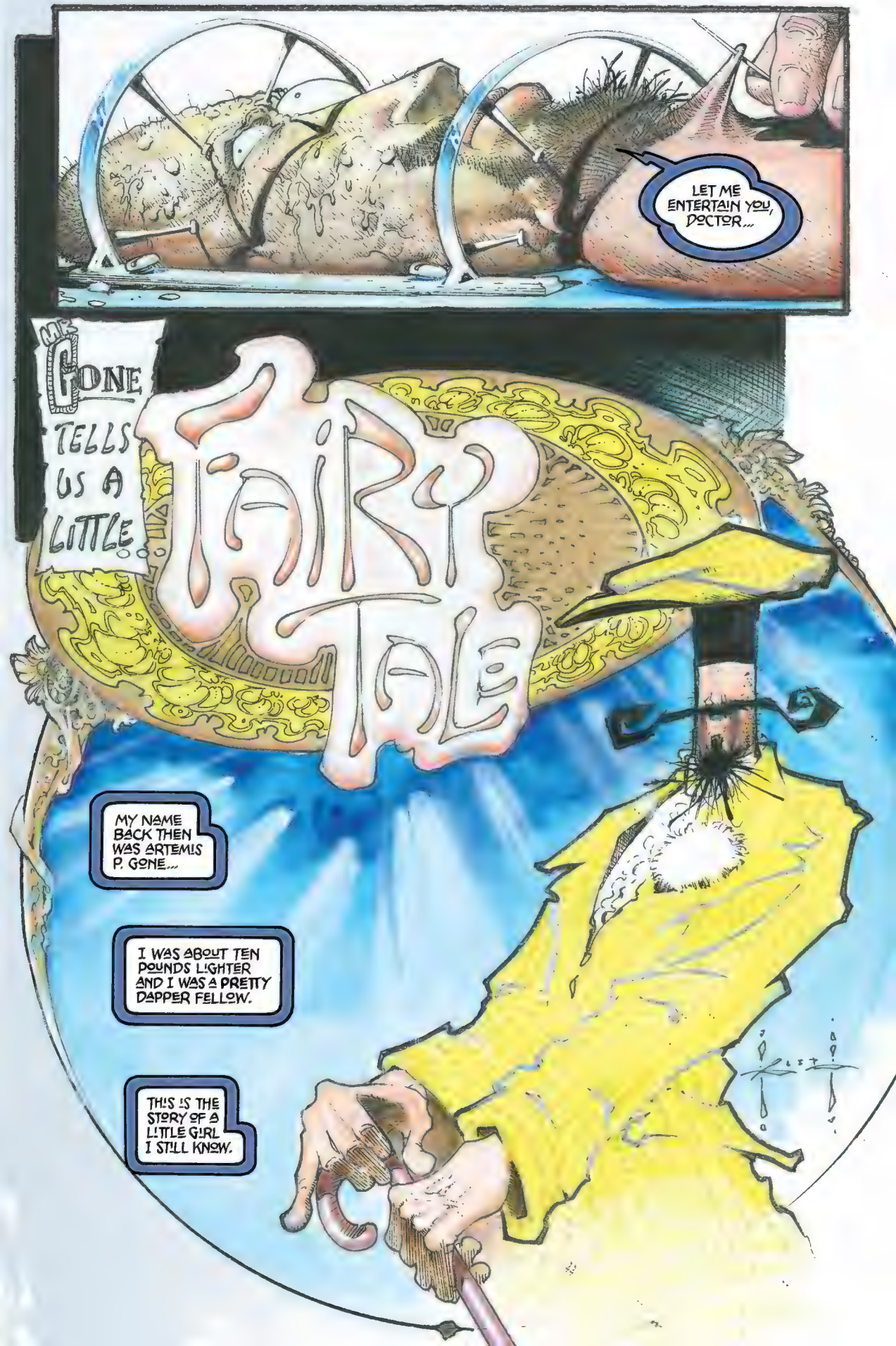


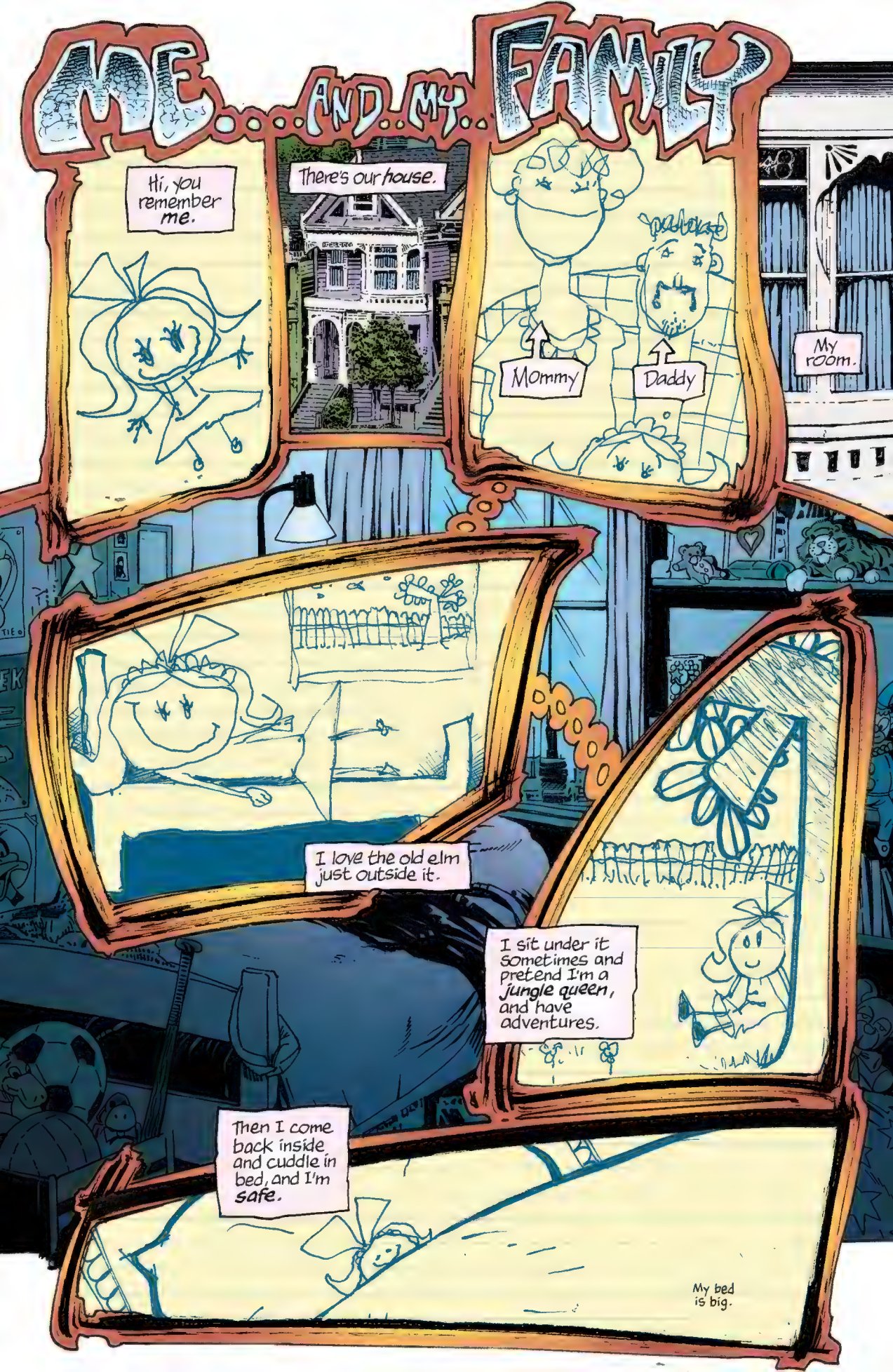
Chapter Two

THE MAXX

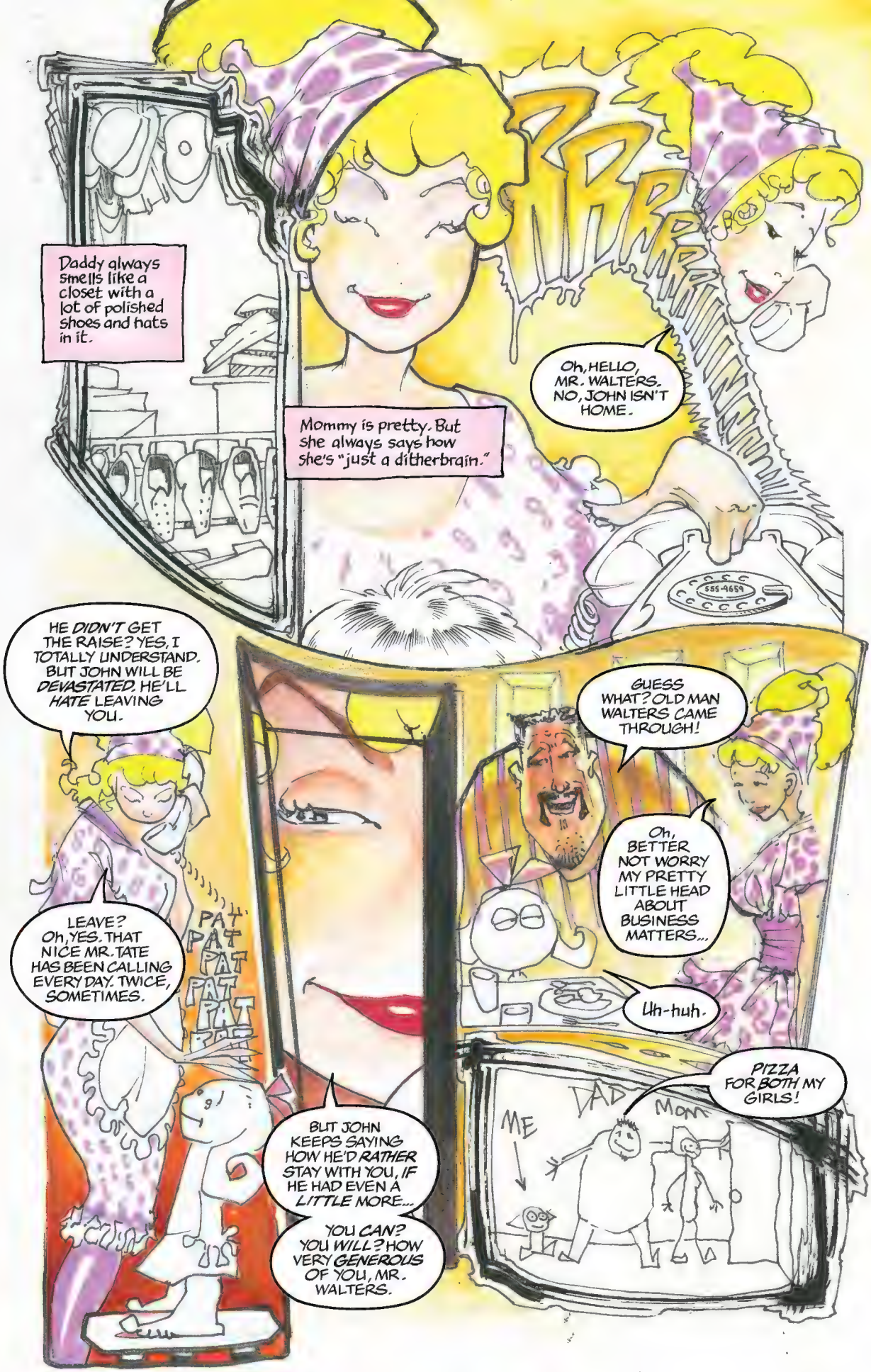

SPRING CLEANING
AFTER A LONG NIGHT OF COMPARING NOTES...
SO, JULIE, ARE YOU KEEPING ALL THESE HOCKEY STICKS, OR WHAT?
YES.
THAT WAS REALLY WEIRD... HOW THAT WHITE... THINGIE BURST IN HERE AND GRABBED MY DAD'S HEAD AND VANISHED, HUH?
YEAH, THAT WAS WEIRD.
AFTER HANGING WITH MAXX SO LONG, I CAN'T TELL ANYMORE.
I HATE MY DAD, PRETENDING TO BE DEAD, WHEN ALL THE TIME HE WAS THAT RAPIST-MURDERER, MR. GONE.
AND YOU CUT HIS HEAD OFF! THAT'S THE BRAVEST THING I EVER HEARD OF.
SARAH... DO YOU HATE HIM FOR BEING A MASS MURDERER... OR 'CAUSE HE LEFT YOU?
NO, SARAH... THE BRAVEST THING I COULD'VE DONE WOULD'VE BEEN TO LISTEN TO HIM.
BIG GULP
BIG GULP
BIG GULP

♪ I want to marry a lighthouse keeper... ♪
VERY GOOD, DOCTOR. KEEP THOSE BRACES TIGHT. THEY'RE GOING TO KEEP MY SPINAL CORD IN PLACE!
...and keep her by the sea! ♪
♪♪♪♪
AND LISTEN, DOC. DON'T GO ALL TENSE ON ME JUST 'CAUSE THERE'S A SMALL ARMY OF 'ISZ WAITING BEHIND THAT DOOR. IT'S NOT LIKE I'M GONNA HAVE THEM EAT YOU WHEN YOU'RE FINISHED SEWING MY HEAD BACK ON. HEH.

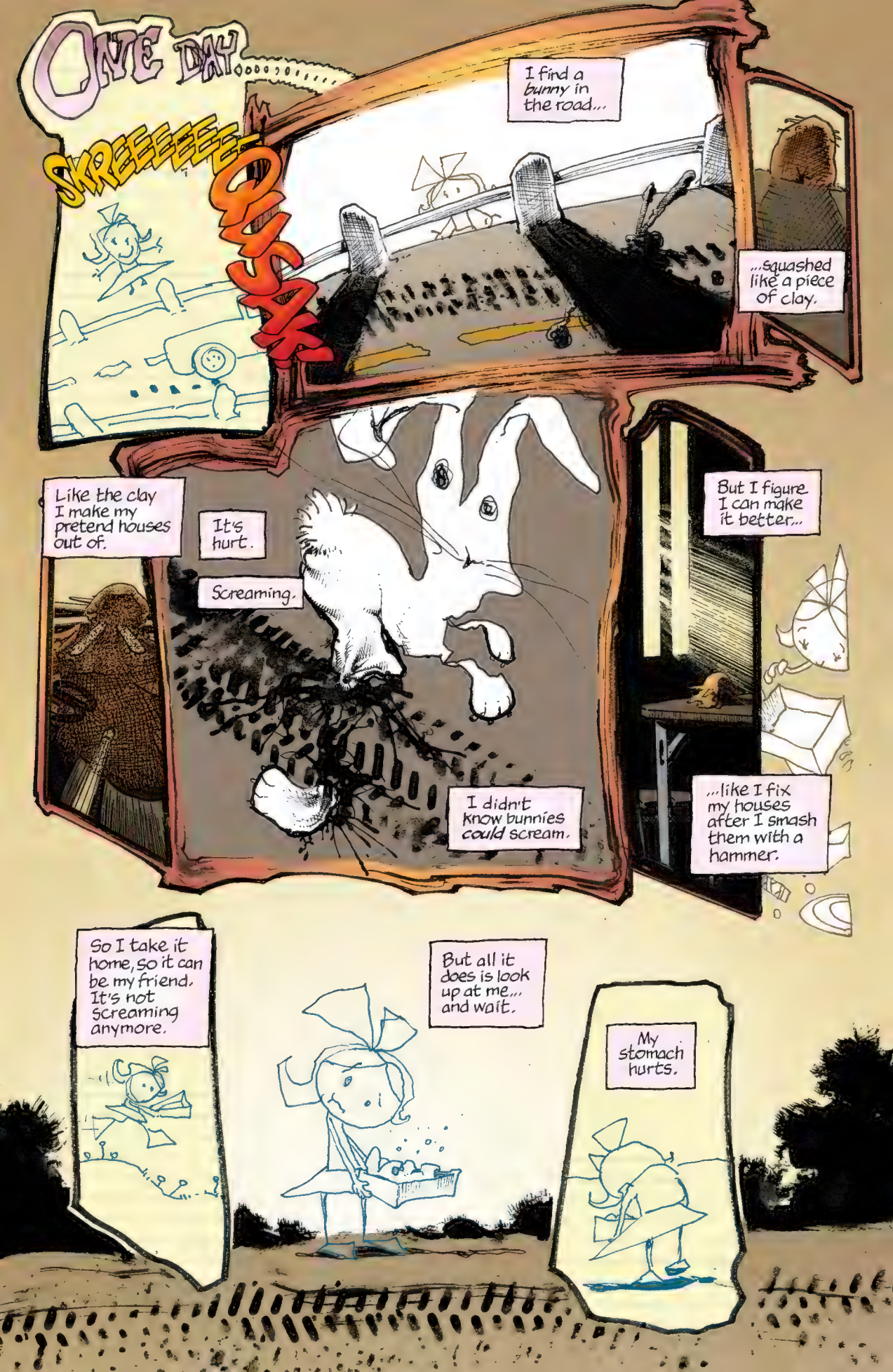

LET ME ENTERTAIN YOU, DOCTOR...
MR. GONE TELLS US A LITTLE...
FAIRY TALE
MY NAME BACK THEN WAS ARTEMIS P. GONE...
I WAS ABOUT TEN POUNDS LIGHTER AND I WAS A PRETTY DAPPER FELLOW.
THIS IS THE STORY OF A LITTLE GIRL I STILL KNOW.


ME....AND..MY..FAMILY
Hi, you remember me.
There's our house.
Mommy
Daddy
My room.
I love the old elm just outside it.
I sit under it sometimes and pretend I'm a jungle queen, and have adventures.
Then I come back inside and cuddle in bed, and I'm safe.
My bed is big.

My daddy draws buildings.
He draws the insides of office buildings downtown. This will be the lobby of the Dexter-Balsco-something building. It will be beautiful. If it ever gets built.
If I was going to work in a building, this is where I'd work.
Daddy wanted to paint covers for paperbacks, but he didn't. Cause publishers are *dumb*, Mommy says.
Sometimes when he thinks I'm asleep, Daddy stabs the drawings he makes with his pencil, over and over, and says bad things.


Daddy always smells like a closet with a lot of polished shoes and hats in it.
Mommy is pretty. But she always says how she's "just a ditherbrain."
RRRR
Oh, HELLO, MR. WALTERS. NO, JOHN ISN'T HOME.
555-4659
HE DIDN'T GET THE RAISE? YES, I TOTALLY UNDERSTAND. BUT JOHN WILL BE DEVASTATED. HE'LL HATE LEAVING YOU.
LEAVE? Oh, YES. THAT NICE MR. TATE HAS BEEN CALLING EVERY DAY. TWICE, SOMETIMES.
PAT PAT PAT PAT PAT PAT
BUT JOHN KEEPS SAYING HOW HE'D RATHER STAY WITH YOU, IF HE HAD EVEN A LITTLE MORE...
YOU CAN? YOU WILL? HOW VERY GENEROUS OF YOU, MR. WALTERS.
GUESS WHAT? OLD MAN WALTERS CAME THROUGH!
Oh, BETTER NOT WORRY MY PRETTY LITTLE HEAD ABOUT BUSINESS MATTERS...
Uh-huh.
PIZZA FOR BOTH MY GIRLS!
ME
DAD
MOM

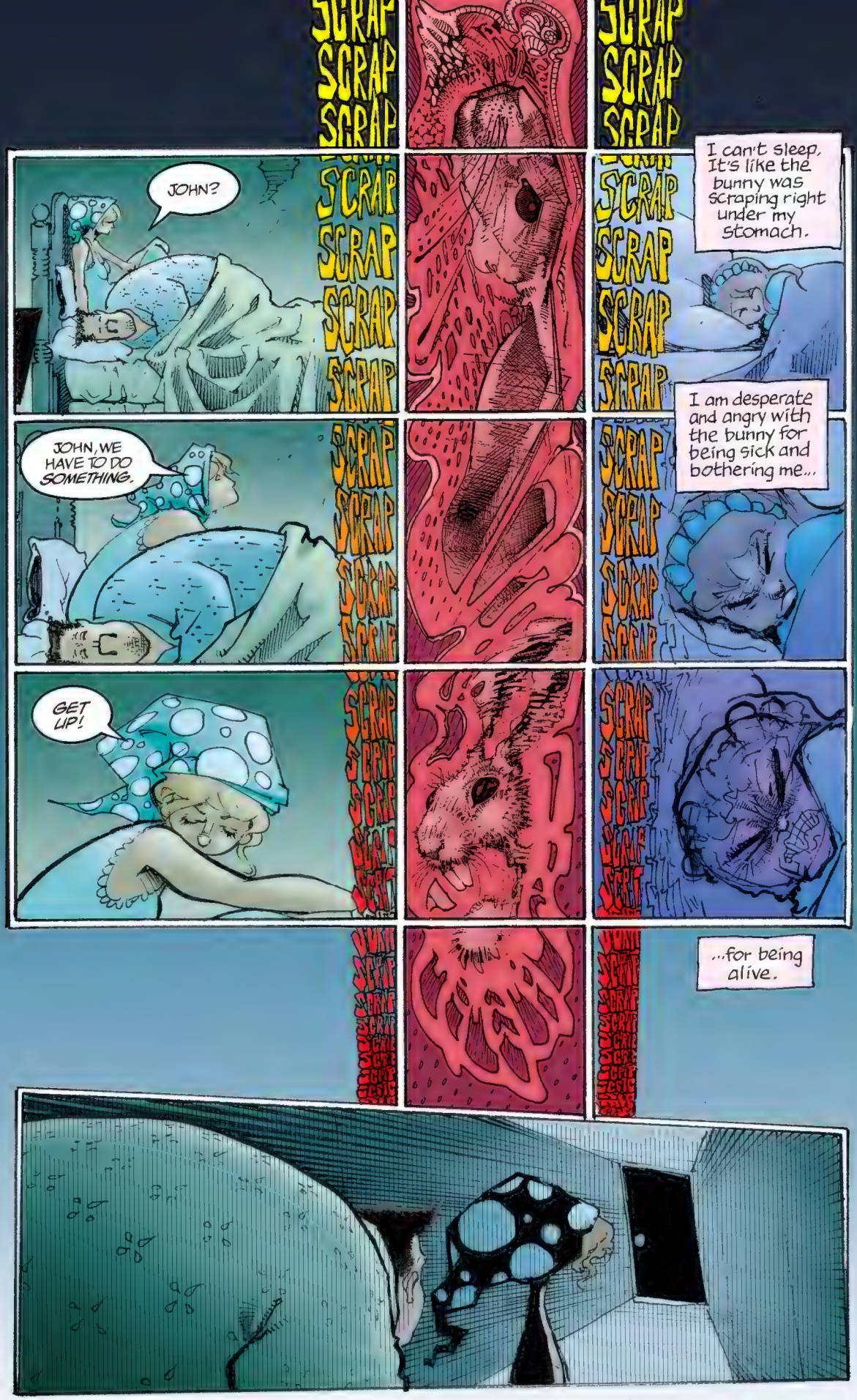
Daddy and I have a lot in common—bugs, for instance.
Ick! A bug!
ICK! A BUG!
MAYBE IF WE DON'T DO ANYTHING, IT'LL JUST WALK OUT OF HERE ON ITS OWN.
UH-OH...
TIME FOR DINNER, EVERYBODY!
CRUNCH!
Mommy always does what has to be done. Something in her shuts off...
...and then she pretends it didn't happen.
I guess that's what being a Mommy is all about.


ONE DAY...
SKREEEEEE-
QUSAK!
I find a bunny in the road...
...squashed like a piece of clay.
But I figure I can make it better...
...like I fix my houses after I smash them with a hammer.
I didn't know bunnies could scream.
Screaming.
It's hurt.
Like the clay I make my pretend houses out of.
So I take it home, so it can be my friend. It's not screaming anymore.
But all it does is look up at me... and wait.
My stomach hurts.

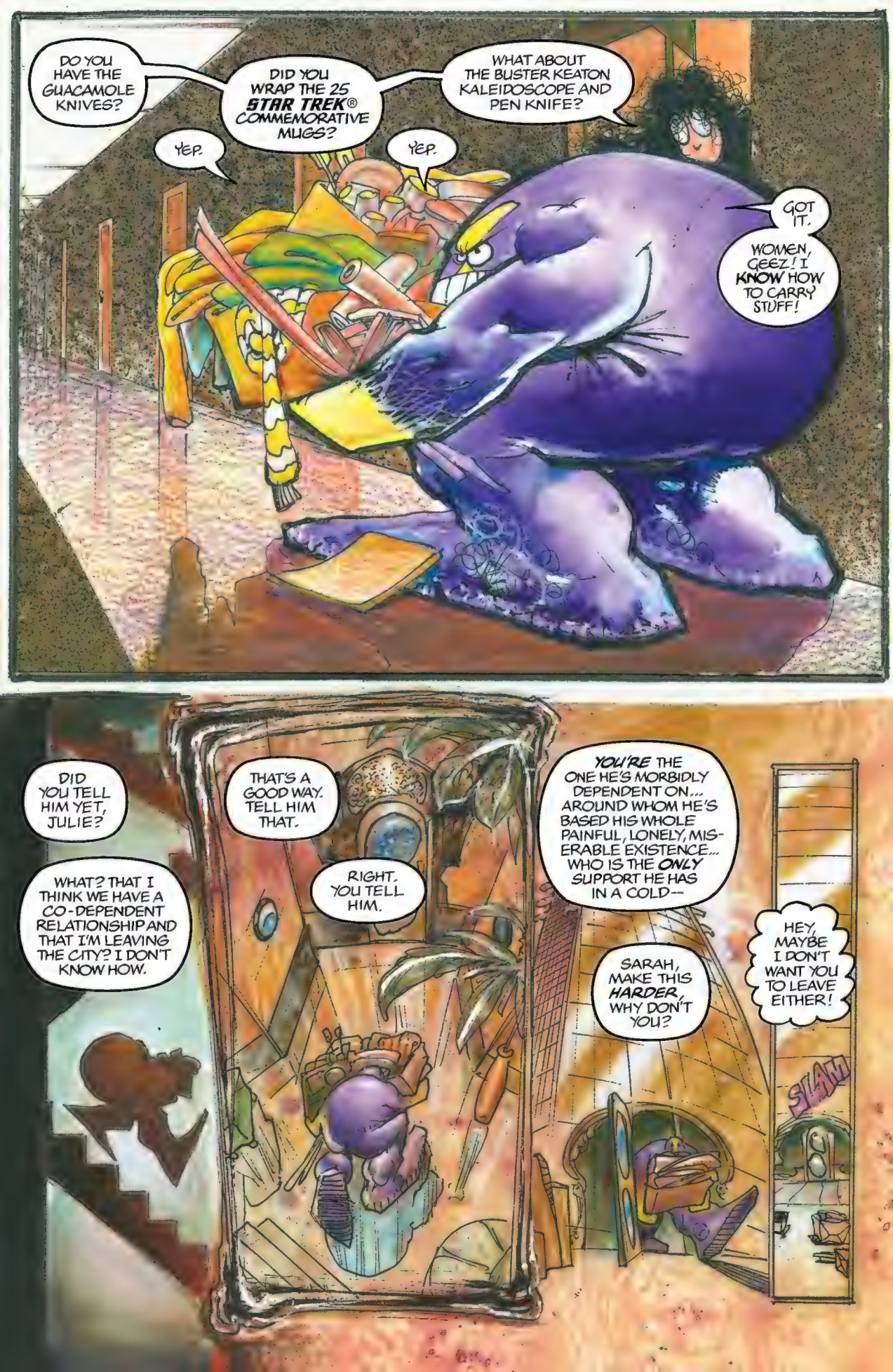
Uncle Artie came to visit one day. I thought Mom said he moved.
He just went to Australia, but now he's back.
He stays down the hall from me.
CLICK
Sometimes he whistles.
I guess I like him okay.
AIRWHALES! AND FLYING SNAILS BIG AS Y'R FIST!
Except when he makes too much noise to hear Captain Kangaroo...
Sometimes I think he looks just like my doll...
Daddy likes to talk to him for hours, to laugh with him. Then he leaves.
Just drives away.
Leaving me alone...
...alone with my little friend.
SCRAP
SCRAP
SCRAP

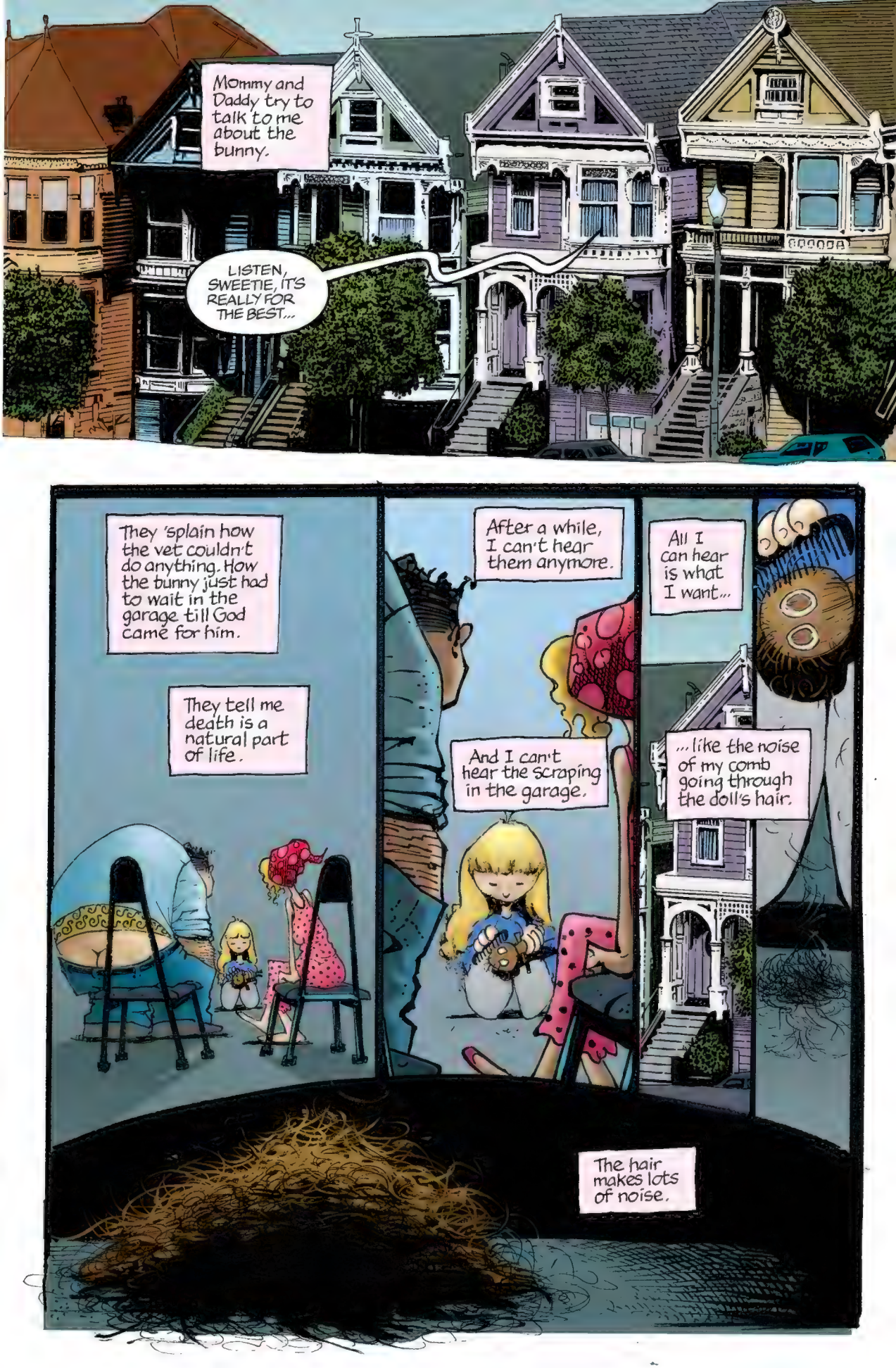
The bunny is under my bed all the time now.
It doesn't get better. It just makes this little scraping noise with its good leg.
I can hear it all the time now.
Even when I'm in the yard under my tree.
G'NIGHT, PUNKIN.
SCRAP SCRATCH SCRAP SCRATCH
SCRAP SCRAP
SCRATCH SCRAP SCRAP
SCRAP SCRAP SCRAP SCRAP
Nothing is any fun anymore.
All I can do is hear that noise. My stomach hurts.
Then, suddenly, it stops.
I want to make it better, but I'm not sure how.

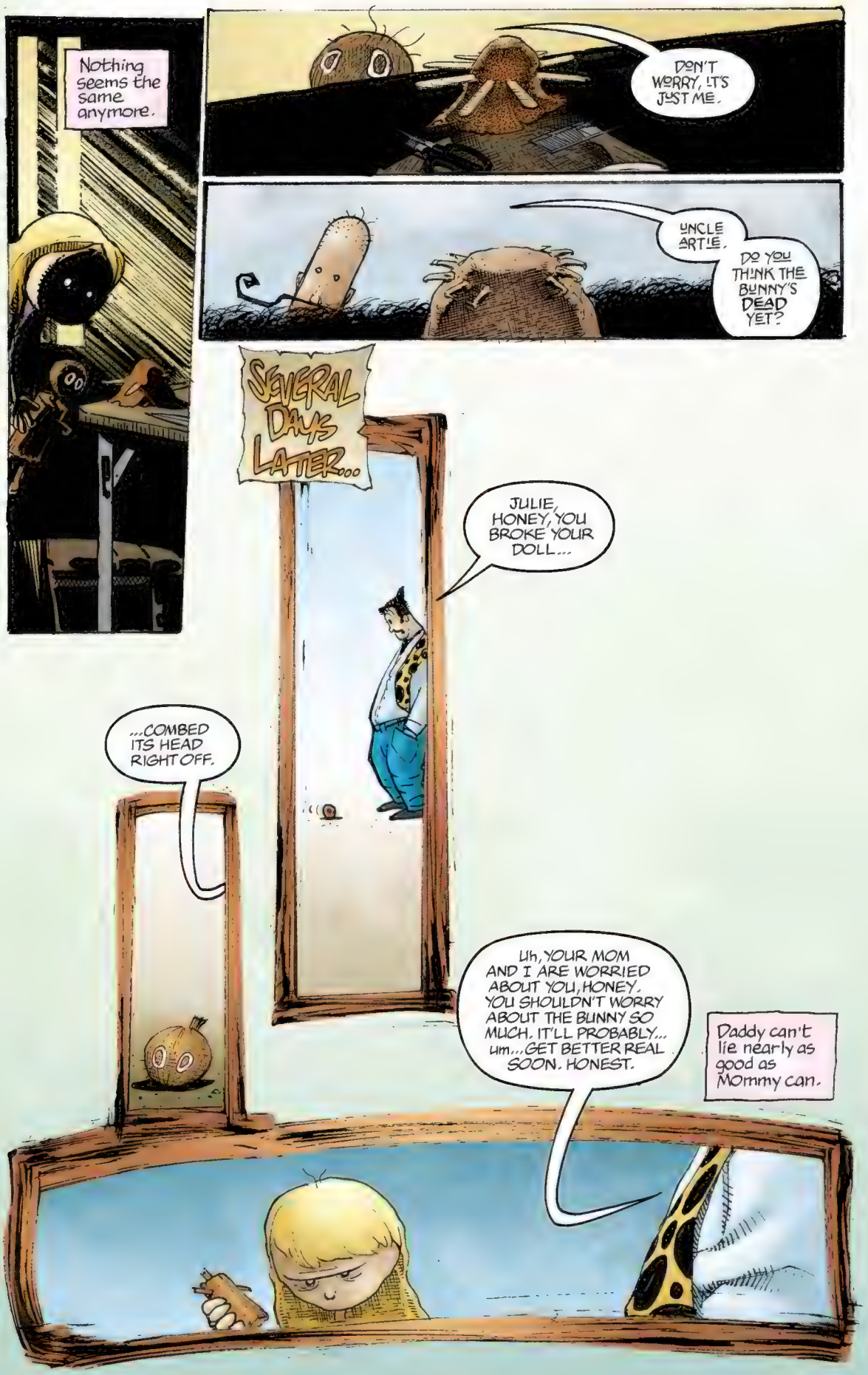
SO, JULIE, C'N I THROW OUT THE CRACKED RECORDS?
NO.
THE BROKEN FLOWERPOTS?
NO.
YOU CAN'T TAKE ALL THIS STUFF.
SUPER TRAMP
BREAKFAST IN AMERICA
THE SPLIT GOLF BALLS? YOU DON'T EVEN PLAY...
YOU NEVER KNOW.
THIS END UP
I THINK THIS WOULD BE AN EXCELLENT PLACE FOR AN INTERMISSION, DOCTOR.
DOES IT SURPRISE YOU THAT, I, MR. GONE, AM A STUDENT OF IRONY? WELL, I AM.
FOR EXAMPLE, THE WHITE ISZ, WHO CAME OVER FROM THE OUTBACK TO SAVE ME, IS CURRENTLY BEING TORMENTED BY HIS BROTHERS, THE BLACK ISZ.
ALTHOUGH ALL ISZ ARE BASICALLY THE SAME CREATURES, THE BLACK ISZ WERE TURNED INSIDE OUT BY THE DIMENSIONAL WARP INTO THIS WORLD, BUT THE WHITE ISZ FOUND A LIGHT HOLE AND WAS UNCHANGED.
THEREFORE, INSTINCTIVELY, THEY HATE HIM, AND TRY TO DROP HIM ON THE SOFT SPOT OF HIS HEAD. IRONIC, NO?
AND ALTHOUGH HE RESCUED ME FROM PUTREFACTION AND I COULD END HIS TORTURE WITH A WORD, I WON'T. I FIND THAT VERY IRONIC.
HOWEVER, SINCE YOU KNOW THAT ONCE YOU ARE DONE, THE BLACK ISZ WILL PROBABLY DEVOUR YOU ALSO, I CAN SEE WHY THE MORE SUBTLE ASPECTS OF HIS PLIGHT ARE LOST ON YOU. PITY. TO CONTINUE...

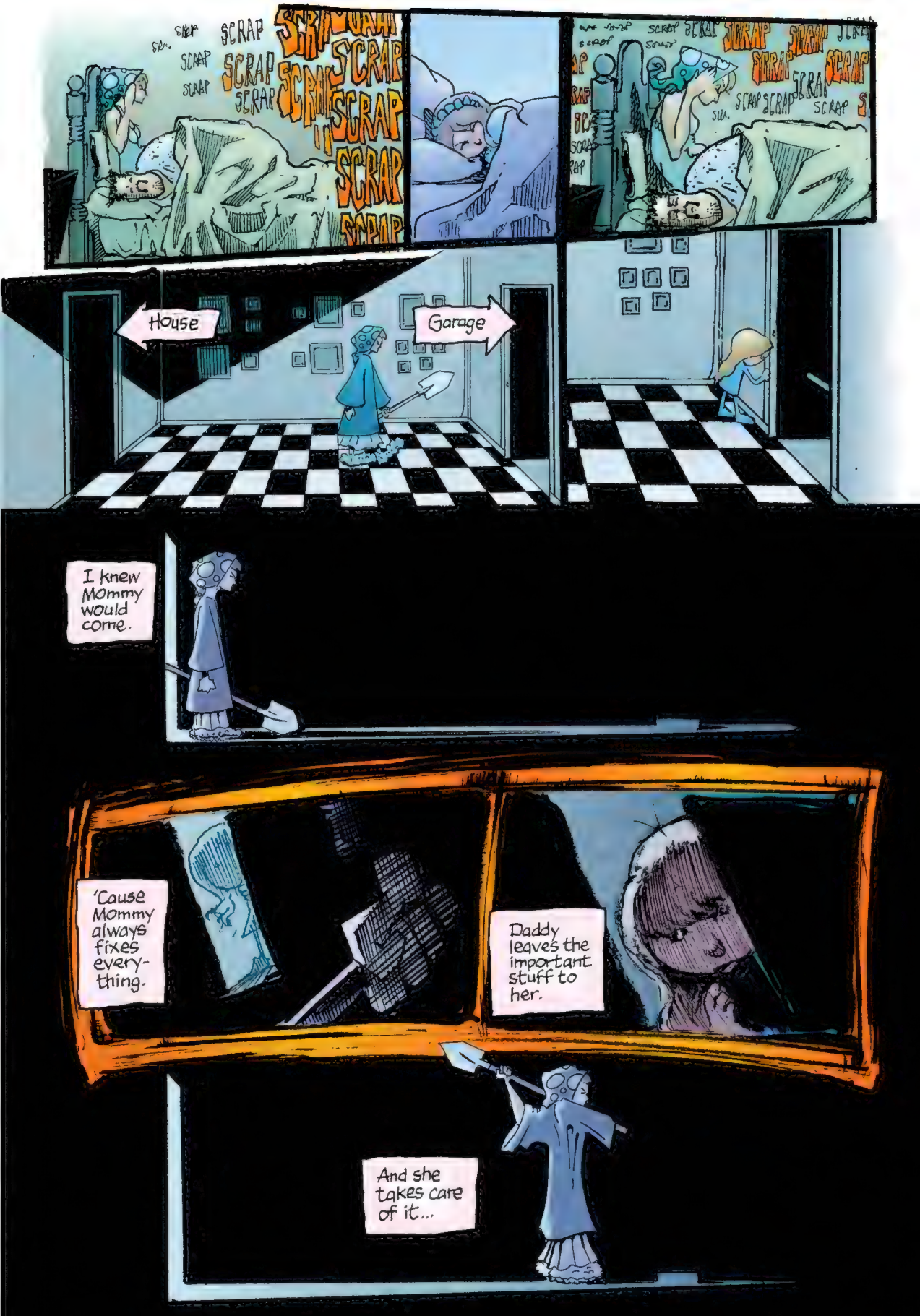

SCRAP
SCRAP
SCRAP
JOHN?
I can't sleep. It's like the bunny was scraping right under my stomach.
JOHN, WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING.
I am desperate and angry with the bunny for being sick and bothering me...
GET UP!
...for being alive.

PUNKIN? CAN WE SEE WHAT YOU'VE GOT THERE?
EEEEEEEEE
OH, GOD. LOOK AT ITS LEG!
Um, SWEETIE? THE BUNNY NEEDS TO LIVE OUT IN THE GARAGE TO GET BETTER.
THAT WAS VERY STRONG OF YOU, JOHN.
Bunny?
They leave. All I know is I tried to help the bunny and I failed.


DO YOU HAVE THE GUACAMOLE KNIVES?
DID YOU WRAP THE 25 STAR TREK® COMMEMORATIVE MUGS?
WHAT ABOUT THE BUSTER KEATON KALEIDOSCOPE AND PEN KNIFE?
YEP.
YEP.
GOT IT.
WOMEN, GEEZ! I KNOW HOW TO CARRY STUFF!
DID YOU TELL HIM YET, JULIE?
WHAT? THAT I THINK WE HAVE A CO-DEPENDENT RELATIONSHIP AND THAT I'M LEAVING THE CITY? I DON'T KNOW HOW.
THAT'S A GOOD WAY. TELL HIM THAT.
RIGHT. YOU TELL HIM.
YOU'RE THE ONE HE'S MORBIDLY DEPENDENT ON... AROUND WHOM HE'S BASED HIS WHOLE PAINFUL, LONELY, MISERABLE EXISTENCE... WHO IS THE ONLY SUPPORT HE HAS IN A COLD--
SARAH, MAKE THIS HARDER, WHY DON'T YOU?
HEY, MAYBE I DON'T WANT YOU TO LEAVE EITHER!
SLAM


Mommy and Daddy try to talk to me about the bunny.
LISTEN, SWEETIE, IT'S REALLY FOR THE BEST...
They 'splain how the vet couldn't do anything. How the bunny just had to wait in the garage till God came for him.
They tell me death is a natural part of life.
After a while, I can't hear them anymore.
And I can't hear the scraping in the garage.
All I can hear is what I want...
...like the noise of my comb going through the doll's hair.
The hair makes lots of noise.


Nothing seems the same anymore.
DON'T WORRY, IT'S JUST ME.
UNCLE ARTIE.
DO YOU THINK THE BUNNY'S DEAD YET?
SEVERAL DAYS LATER...
JULIE, HONEY, YOU BROKE YOUR DOLL...
...COMBED ITS HEAD RIGHT OFF.
Uh, YOUR MOM AND I ARE WORRIED ABOUT YOU, HONEY. YOU SHOULDN'T WORRY ABOUT THE BUNNY SO MUCH. IT'LL PROBABLY... um... GET BETTER REAL SOON. HONEST.
Daddy can't lie nearly as good as Mommy can.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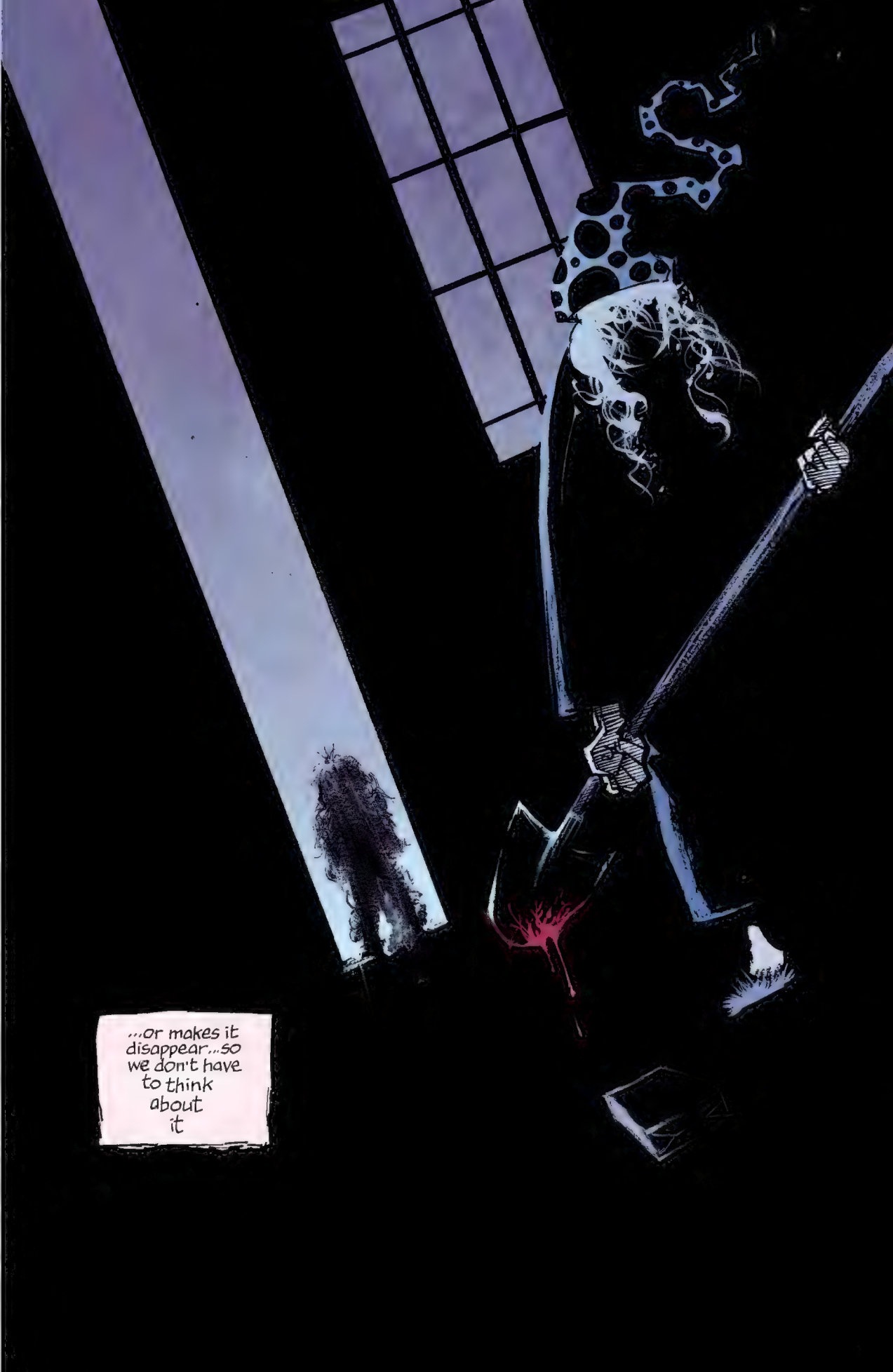
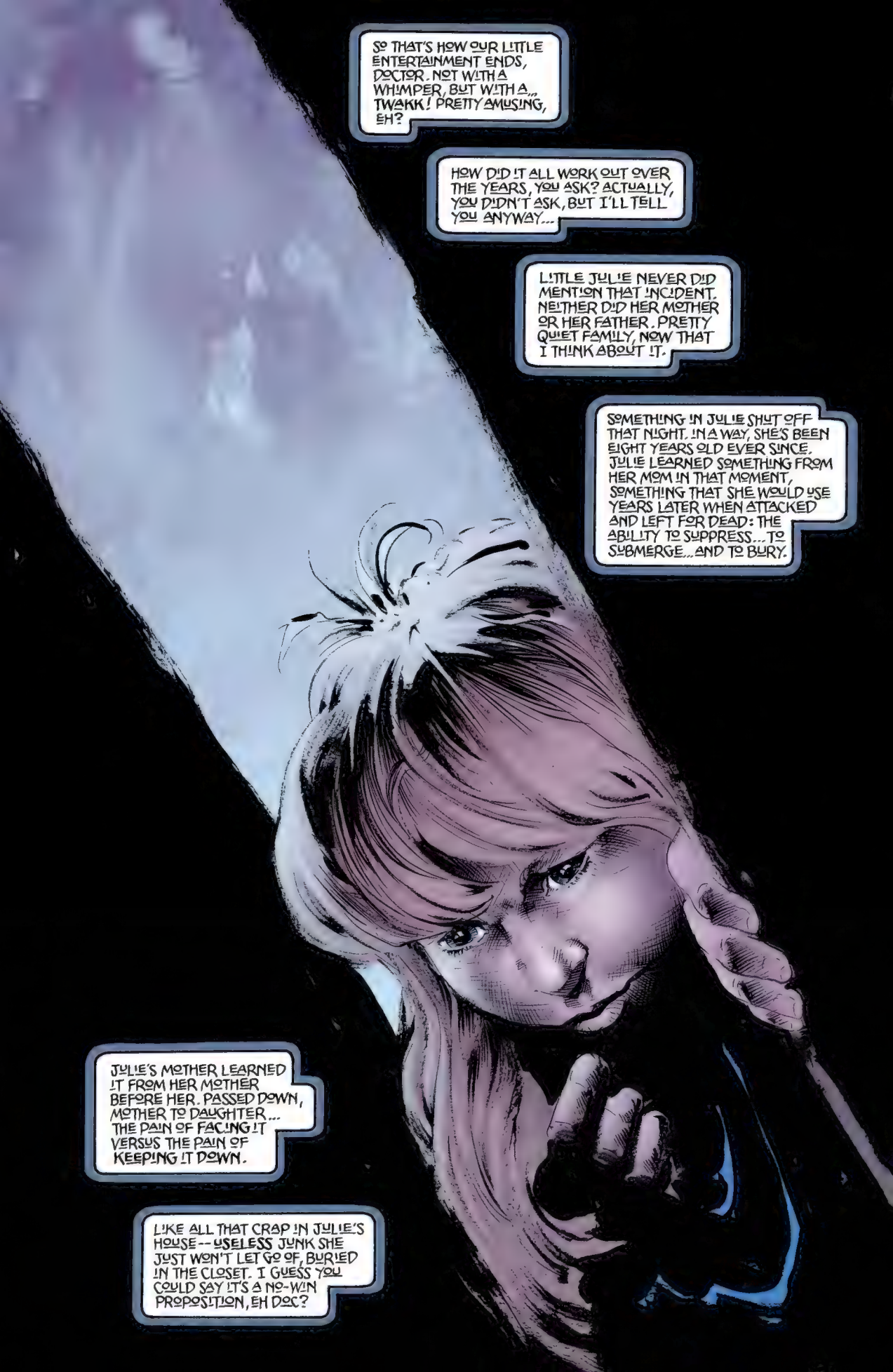
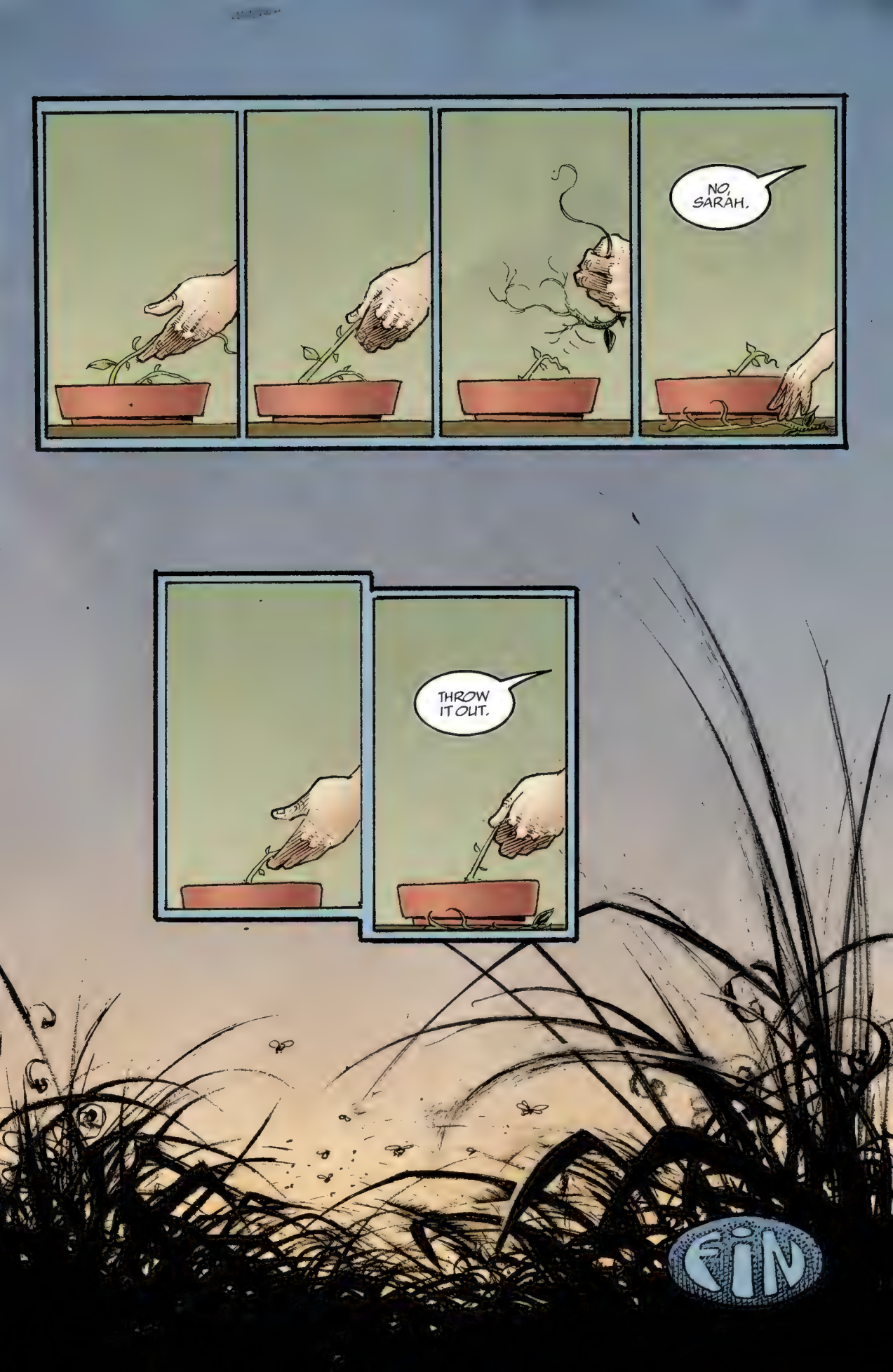
House
Garage
I knew Mommy would come.
'Cause Mommy always fixes every-thing.
Daddy leaves the important stuff to her.
And she takes care of it...


...or makes it disappear...so we don't have to think about it


SO THAT'S HOW OUR LITTLE ENTERTAINMENT ENDS, DOCTOR. NOT WITH A WHIMPER, BUT WITH A... TWAKK! PRETTY AMUSING, EH?
HOW DID IT ALL WORK OUT OVER THE YEARS, YOU ASK? ACTUALLY, YOU DIDN'T ASK, BUT I'LL TELL YOU ANYWAY...
LITTLE JULIE NEVER DID MENTION THAT INCIDENT. NEITHER DID HER MOTHER OR HER FATHER. PRETTY QUIET FAMILY, NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT.
SOMETHING IN JULIE SHUT OFF THAT NIGHT. IN A WAY, SHE'S BEEN EIGHT YEARS OLD EVER SINCE. JULIE LEARNED SOMETHING FROM HER MOM IN THAT MOMENT, SOMETHING THAT SHE WOULD USE YEARS LATER WHEN ATTACKED AND LEFT FOR DEAD: THE ABILITY TO SUPPRESS... TO SUBMERGE... AND TO BURY.
JULIE'S MOTHER LEARNED IT FROM HER MOTHER BEFORE HER. PASSED DOWN, MOTHER TO DAUGHTER... THE PAIN OF FACING IT VERSUS THE PAIN OF KEEPING IT DOWN.
LIKE ALL THAT CRAP IN JULIE'S HOUSE -- USELESS JUNK SHE JUST WON'T LET GO OF, BURIED IN THE CLOSET. I GUESS YOU COULD SAY IT'S A NO-WIN PROPOSITION, EH DOC?

BUT ACTUALLY, YOU COULDN'T SAY ANY OF THAT, COULD YOU, DOCTOR?
YOU AREN'T, AS WE SAY, ALL THERE.
WELL, MOST OF YOU 'S THERE... BUT SOME OF YOU 'S THERE... SOME OF YOU 'S OVER THERE... YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.
AU REVOIR, DOC. IT'S BEEN SWELL.
SO. YOU READY?
JUST ABOUT. THINGS ARE A LOT CLEARER AROUND HERE NOW.
WHEN I WAS TRAPPED IN THE OUTBACK, I KEPT MEETING LITTLE VERSIONS OF MYSELF.
I THINK THAT MEANS THERE'S STILL A LOT OF STUFF TO LEARN ABOUT MYSELF, BEFORE I CAN START SCREWING WITH OTHER PEOPLE.
I SUPPOSE YOU'RE KEEPING THIS OLD RUSTY SHOVEL, TOO?

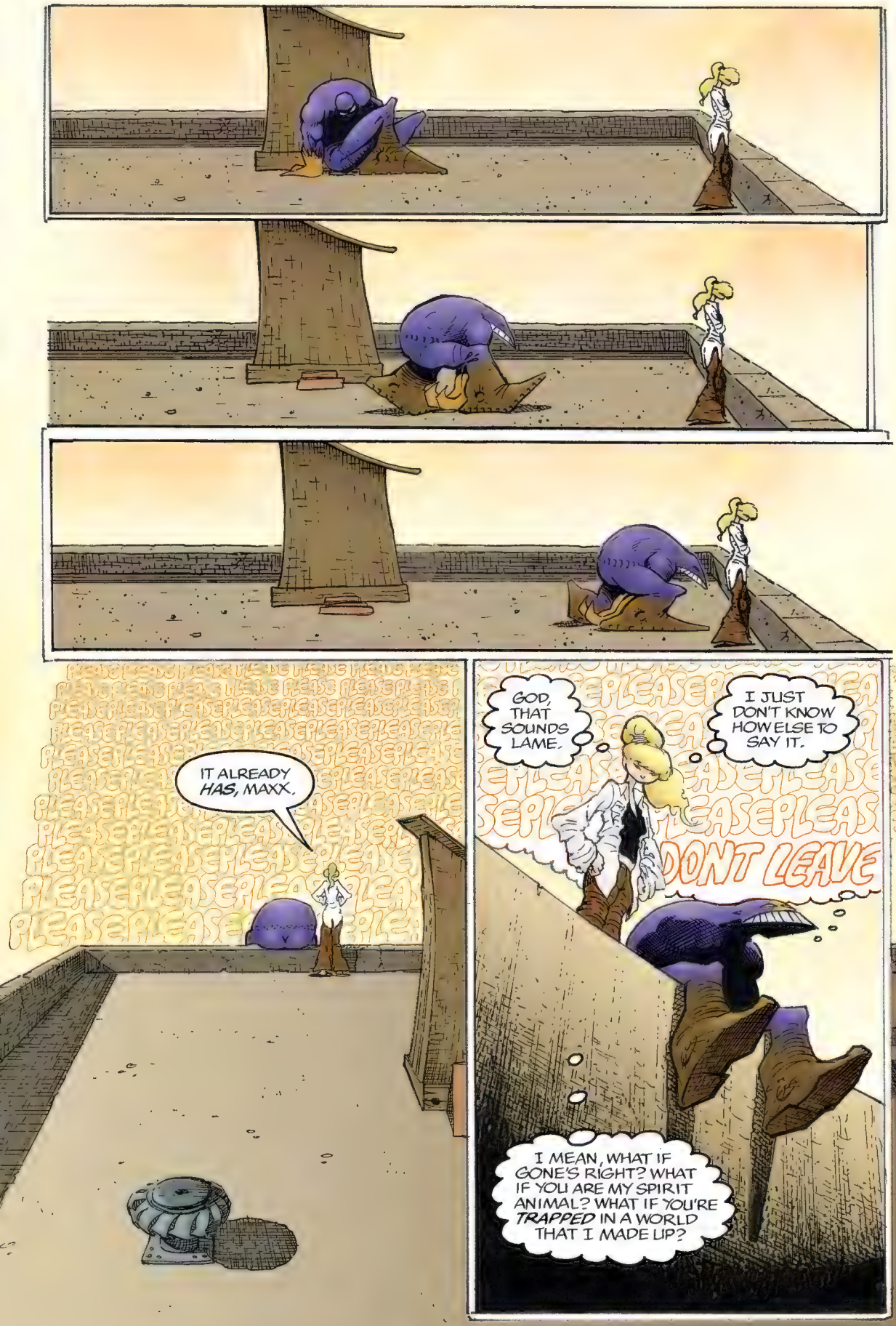

NO, SARAH.
THROW IT OUT.
FIN

Chapter Three
THE MAW

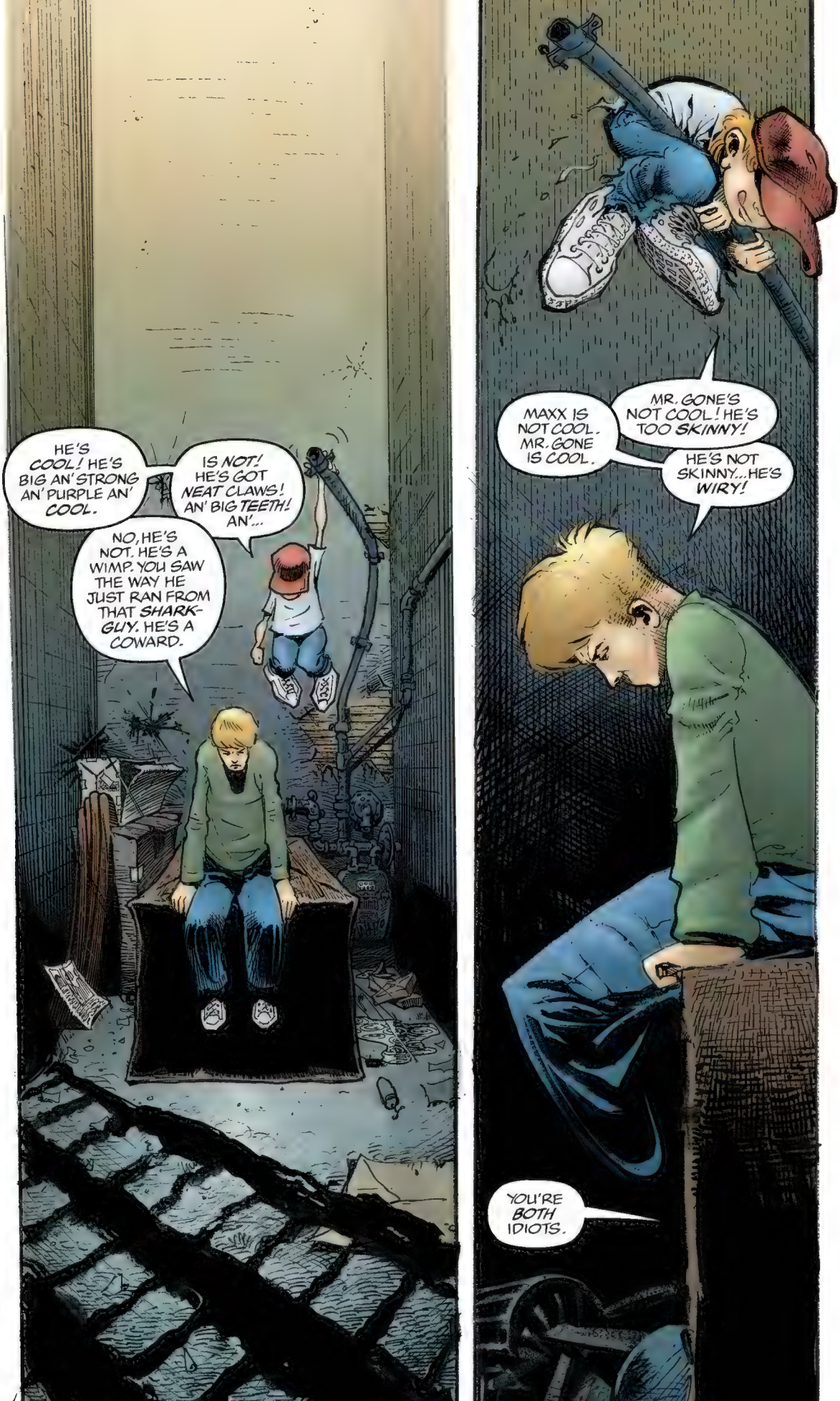
"I MEAN, IF YOU SEARCH YOUR HEART, YOU'LL SEE I'M RIGHT."

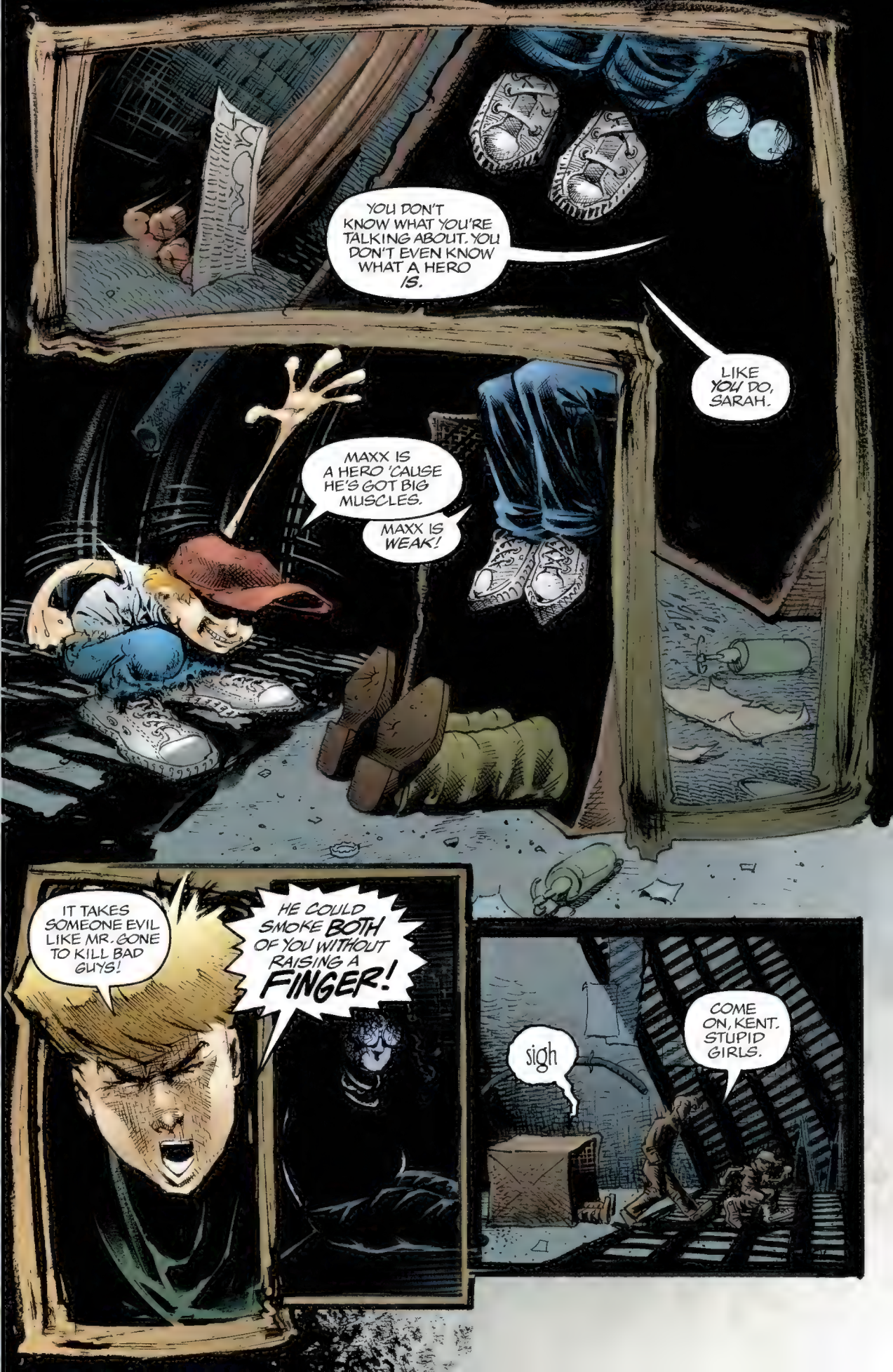
IT'S JUST LIKE THAT PLANE.
IT'S GOT TO FLY.
IT KNOWS IT DOES.
AND SO DO I.
I THOUGHT YOU WERE DRIVING.
OKAY, BAD ANALOGY. STILL...

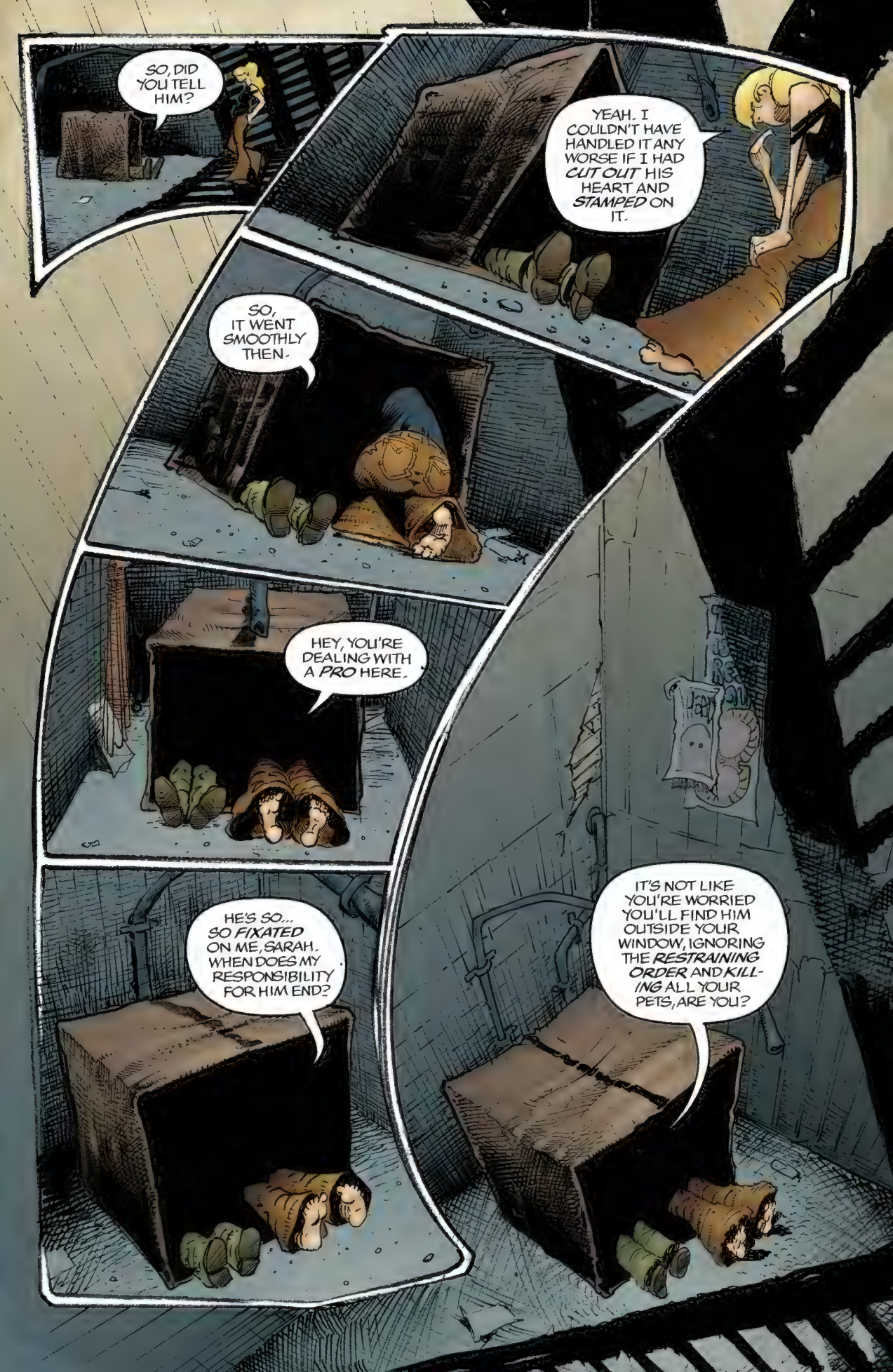
LOOK, MAXX. YOU'VE GOT TO GIVE SOME HERE, OKAY?
C'MON, MAN...
...PLEASE DON'T SHUT ME OUT.
WE CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS... YOU RESCUE ME. I BAIL YOU OUT. I LIVE IN YOUR FANTASY. YOU LIVE IN MINE.
WE'VE GOT TO STOP PRETENDING.
BUT IF YOU LEAVE...
...EVERYTHING WILL CHANGE.

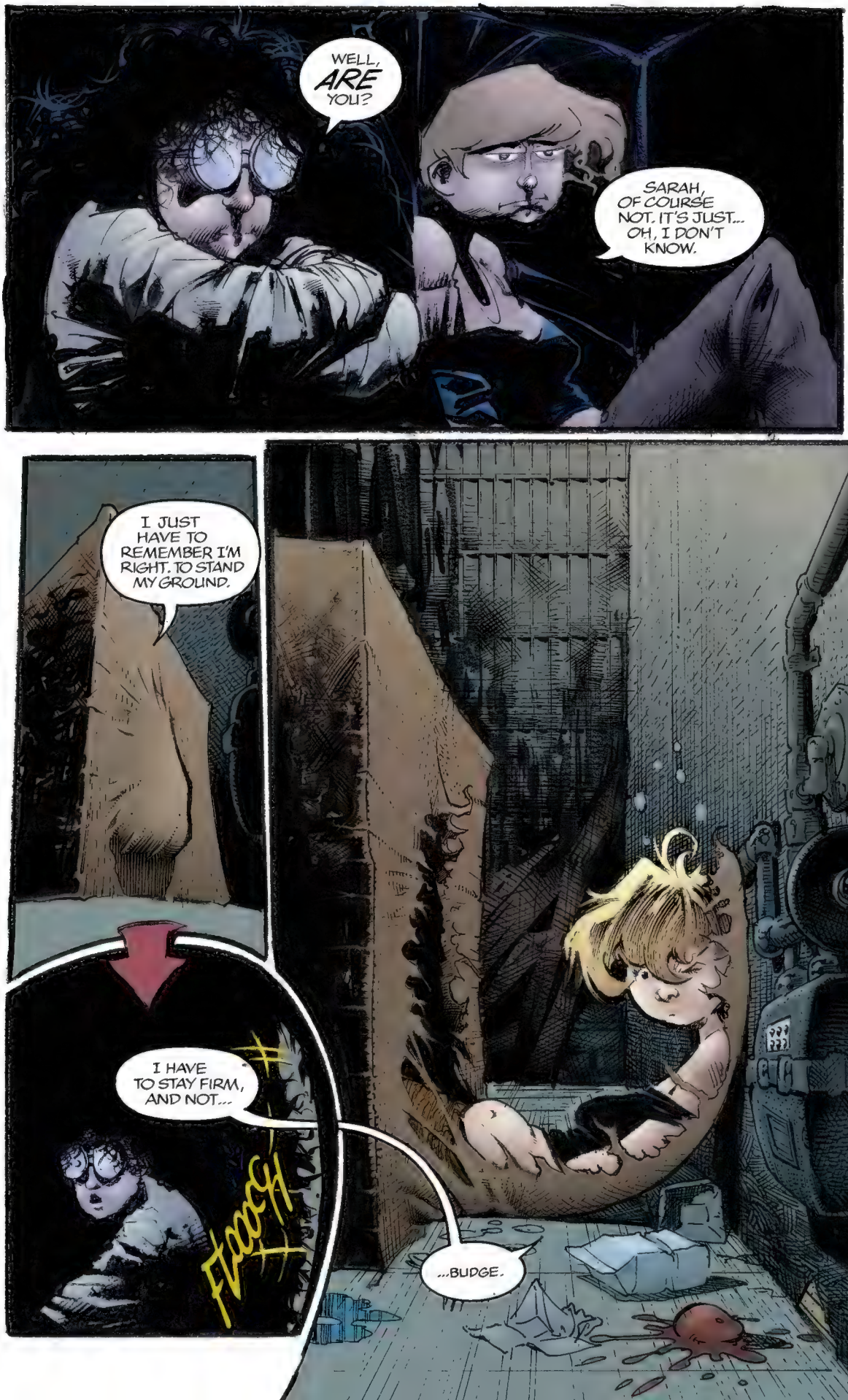

IT ALREADY HAS, MAXX.
GOD, THAT SOUNDS LAME.
I JUST DON'T KNOW HOW ELSE TO SAY IT.
DON'T LEAVE
I MEAN, WHAT IF GONE'S RIGHT? WHAT IF YOU ARE MY SPIRIT ANIMAL? WHAT IF YOU'RE TRAPPED IN A WORLD THAT I MADE UP?

WHY DON'T YOU SAY SOMETHING? YOU MAKE ME FEEL SO GUILTY
IT'S NICE UP HERE, HUH?
SURE.
THE ONLY WAY I CAN SET YOU FREE IS TO LEAVE
PEOPLE LOOK LIKE ANTS, HUH?
DEEP.
AND IT'S THE ONLY WAY I'LL BE FREE TOO. CAN'T YOU SEE THAT?


HE'S COOL! HE'S BIG AN' STRONG AN' PURPLE AN' COOL.
IS NOT! HE'S GOT NEAT CLAWS! AN' BIG TEETH! AN'...
NO, HE'S NOT. HE'S A WIMP. YOU SAW THE WAY HE JUST RAN FROM THAT SHARK-GUY. HE'S A COWARD.
MAXX IS NOT COOL. MR. GONE IS COOL.
MR. GONE'S NOT COOL! HE'S TOO SKINNY!
HE'S NOT SKINNY...HE'S WIRY!
YOU'RE BOTH IDIOTS.

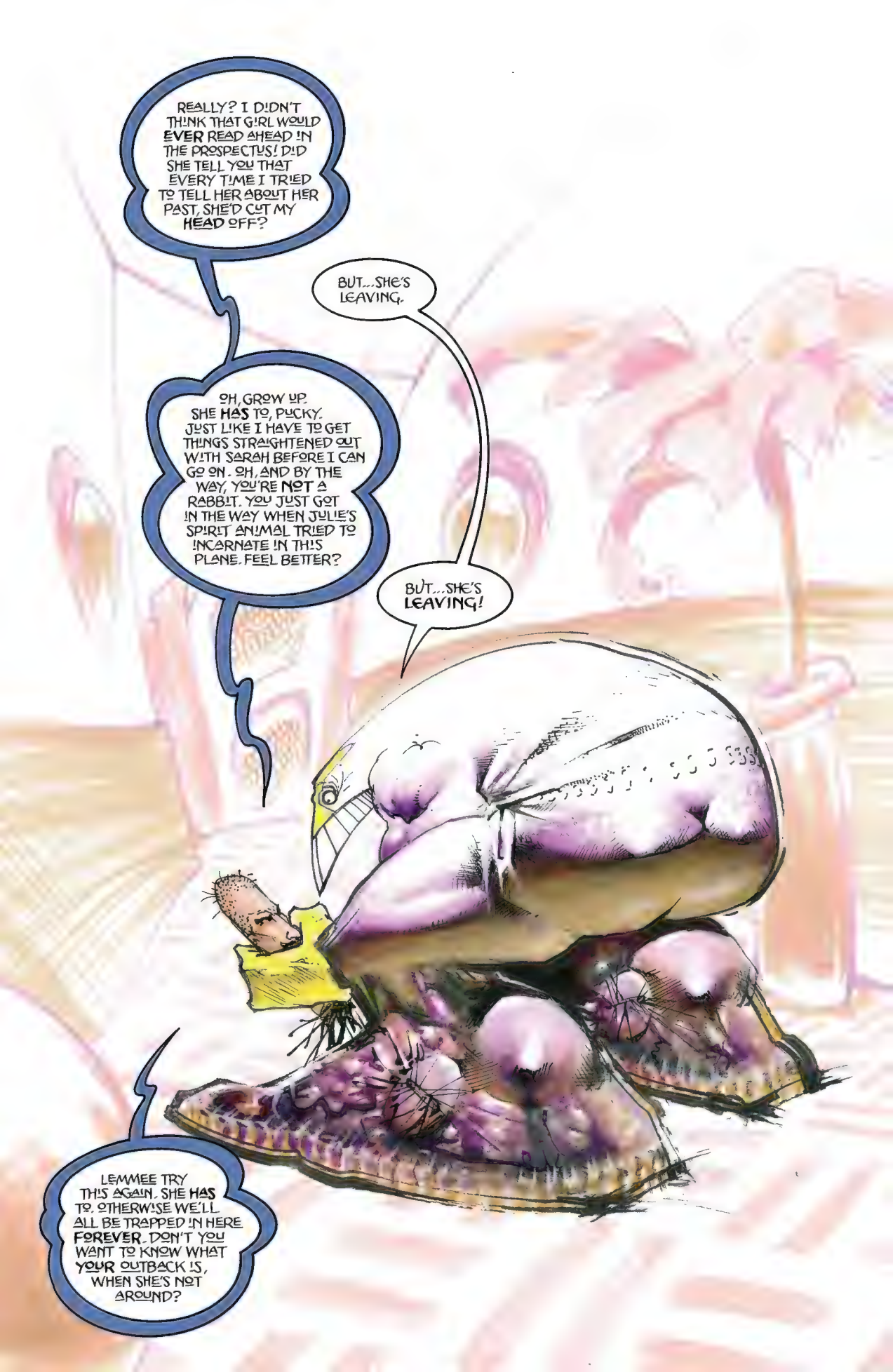

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT. YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT A HERO IS.
LIKE YOU DO, SARAH.
MAXX IS A HERO 'CAUSE HE'S GOT BIG MUSCLES.
MAXX IS WEAK!
IT TAKES SOMEONE EVIL LIKE MR. GONE TO KILL BAD GUYS!
HE COULD SMOKE BOTH OF YOU WITHOUT RAISING A FINGER!
sigh
COME ON, KENT. STUPID GIRLS.


SO, DID YOU TELL HIM?
YEAH. I COULDN'T HAVE HANDLED IT ANY WORSE IF I HAD CUT OUT HIS HEART AND STAMPED ON IT.
SO, IT WENT SMOOTHLY THEN.
HEY, YOU'RE DEALING WITH A PRO HERE.
HE'S SO... SO FIXATED ON ME, SARAH. WHEN DOES MY RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIM END?
IT'S NOT LIKE YOU'RE WORRIED YOU'LL FIND HIM OUTSIDE YOUR WINDOW, IGNORING THE RESTRAINING ORDER AND KILLING ALL YOUR PETS, ARE YOU?

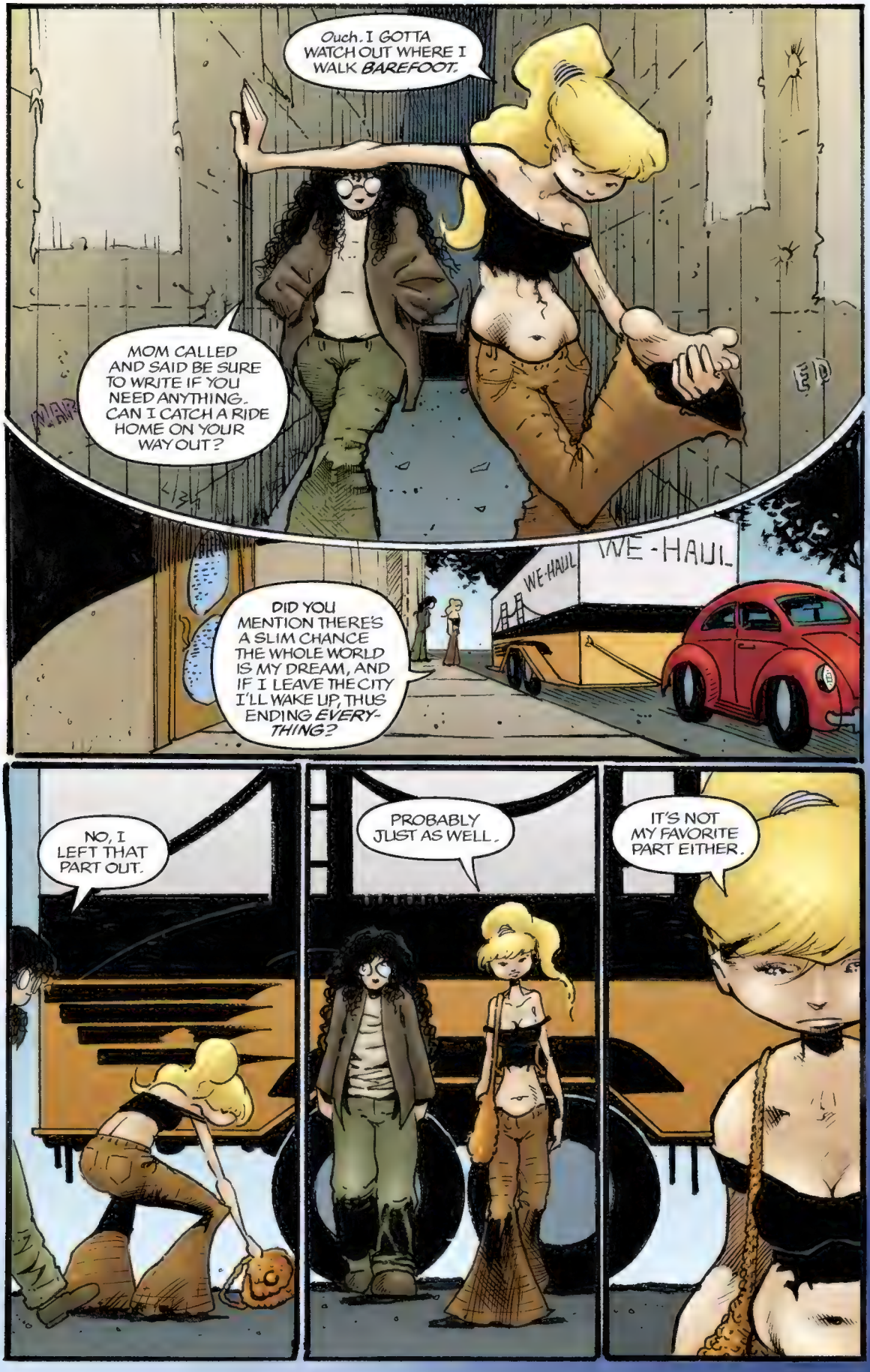

WELL, ARE YOU?
SARAH, OF COURSE NOT. IT'S JUST... OH, I DON'T KNOW.
I JUST HAVE TO REMEMBER I'M RIGHT. TO STAND MY GROUND.
I HAVE TO STAY FIRM, AND NOT...
FLOOSH
...BUDGE.

THUT!

GONE!
THAT'S MR. GONE TO YOU, CLAW-BOY.
ACTUALLY, YOU'RE JUST THE LITTLE BUNDLE OF NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT I WANTED TO TALK TO.
I'VE GOT TO TIDY UP MY KARMA ON THIS PLANE BEFORE I GO.
JULIE'S LEAVING.


REALLY? I DIDN'T THINK THAT GIRL WOULD EVER READ AHEAD IN THE PROSPECTUS! DID SHE TELL YOU THAT EVERY TIME I TRIED TO TELL HER ABOUT HER PAST, SHE'D CUT MY HEAD OFF?
BUT...SHE'S LEAVING.
OH, GROW UP. SHE HAS TO, PUCKY. JUST LIKE I HAVE TO GET THINGS STRAIGHTENED OUT WITH SARAH BEFORE I CAN GO ON. OH, AND BY THE WAY, YOU'RE NOT A RABBIT. YOU JUST GOT IN THE WAY WHEN JULIE'S SPIRIT ANIMAL TRIED TO INCARNATE IN THIS PLANE. FEEL BETTER?
BUT...SHE'S LEAVING!
LEMMEE TRY THIS AGAIN. SHE HAS TO. OTHERWISE WE'LL ALL BE TRAPPED IN HERE FOREVER. DON'T YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT YOUR OUTBACK IS, WHEN SHE'S NOT AROUND?

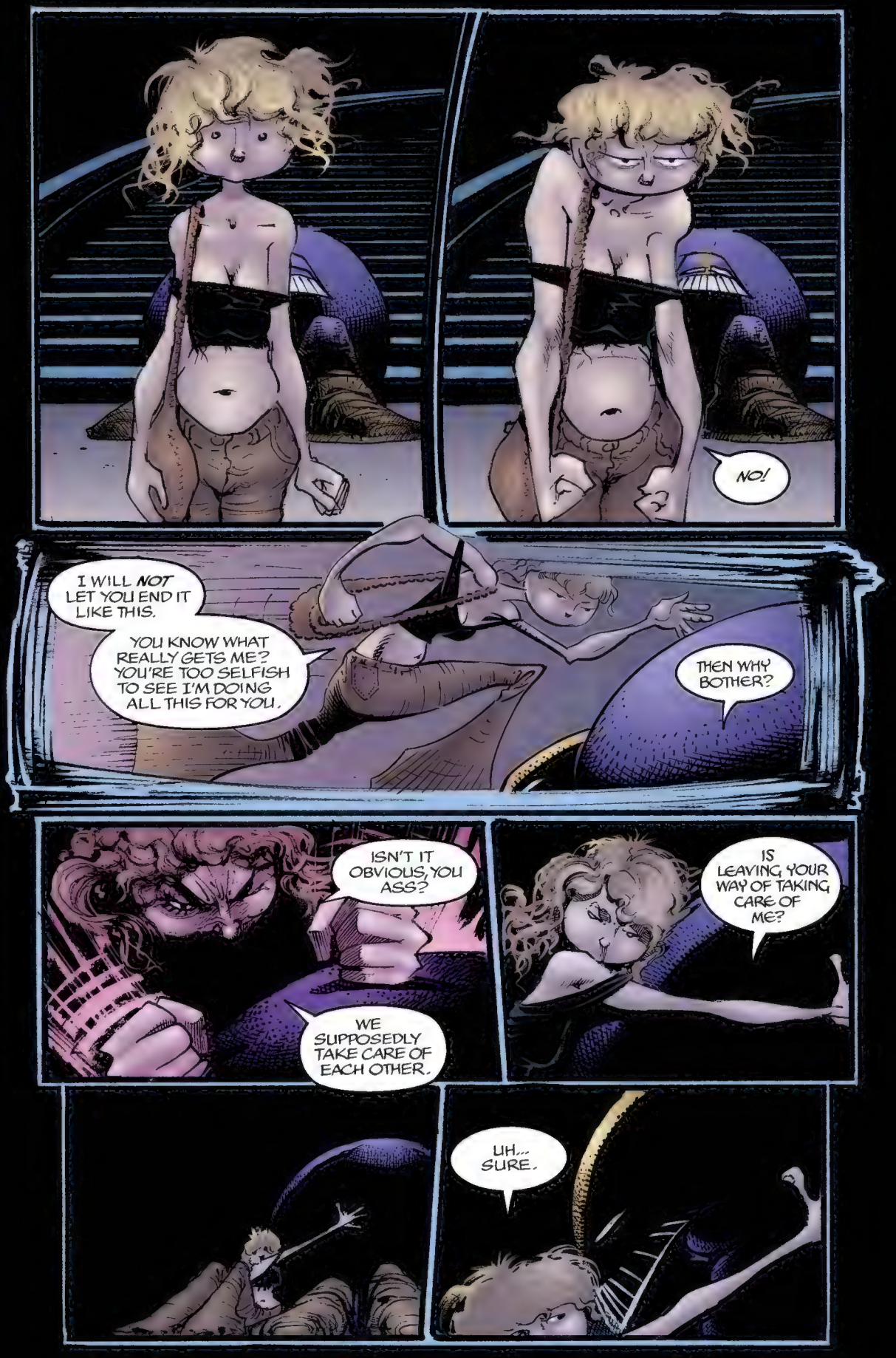
AFTER ALL, IT'S NOT LIKE SHE REALLY NEEDS Y--
--OU...
SQUISH
VERY MATURE.


Ouch. I GOTTA WATCH OUT WHERE I WALK BAREFOOT.
MOM CALLED AND SAID BE SURE TO WRITE IF YOU NEED ANYTHING. CAN I CATCH A RIDE HOME ON YOUR WAY OUT?
DID YOU MENTION THERE'S A SLIM CHANCE THE WHOLE WORLD IS MY DREAM, AND IF I LEAVE THE CITY I'LL WAKE UP, THUS ENDING EVERY-THING?
WE-HAUL
NO, I LEFT THAT PART OUT.
PROBABLY JUST AS WELL.
IT'S NOT MY FAVORITE PART EITHER.

WHUMP
DARK ENOUGH IN HERE...
MAXX? YOU HERE?
I'VE GOT PEZ...
HMM. THAT USUALLY WORKS.
MAXX?
I'VE COME TO SAY GOODBYE.
BYE.

DAMMIT, MAXX. WHY ARE YOU ACTING THIS WAY?
IT'S NOT LIKE YOU THINK YOU'LL *DISAPPEAR* IF I LEAVE, RIGHT?
RIGHT, MAXX?
GOD, MAXX. YOU DO. IT'S GONNA BE ALL RIGHT.

DAMN YOU! WHY DO I HAVE TO BE THE BAD GUY HERE?
MAXX, IF YOU *REALLY* CARED ABOUT ME, YOU WOULDN'T MAKE THIS ANY HARDER THAN IT ALREADY IS.
THEN I DON'T CARE.

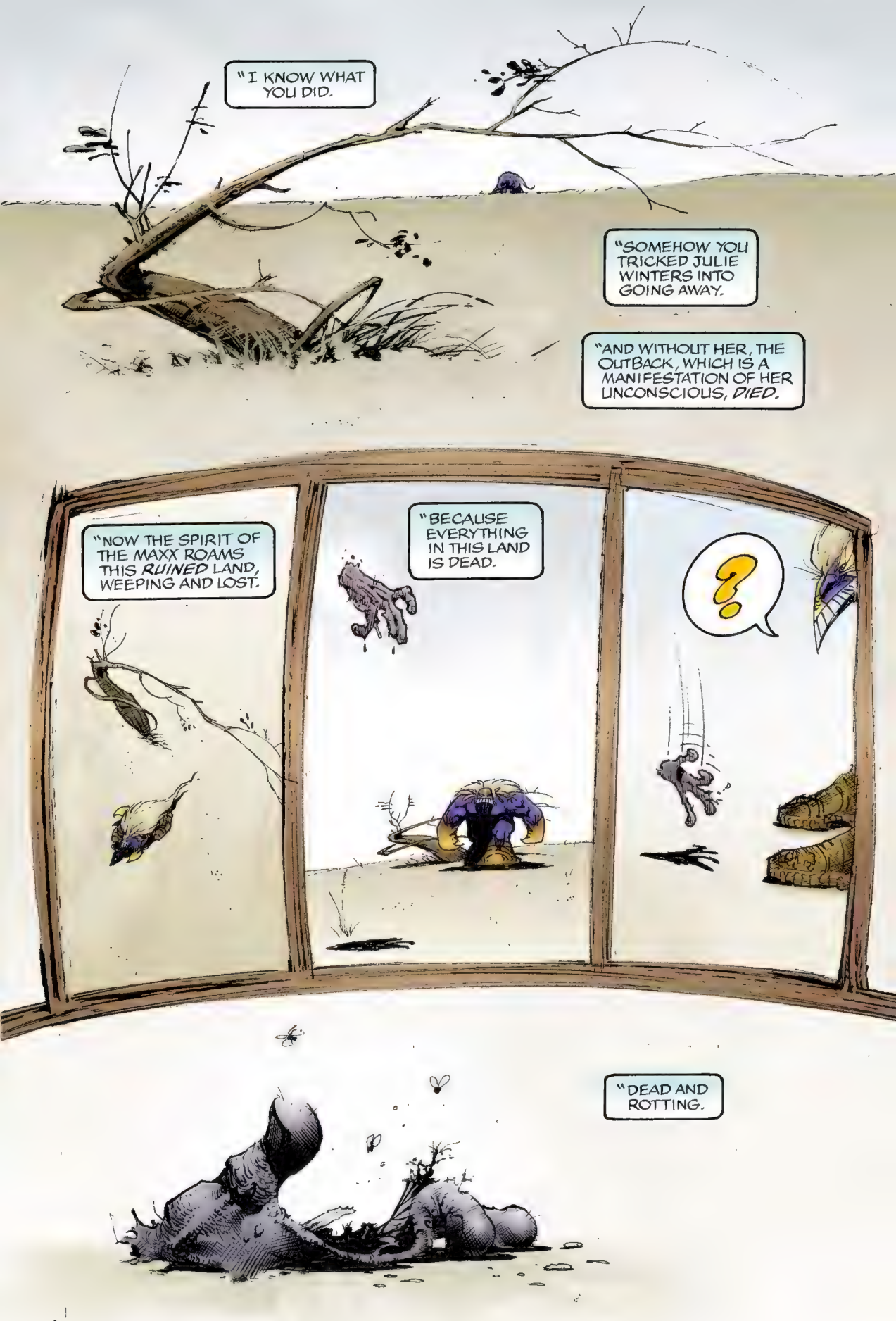

NO!
I WILL NOT LET YOU END IT LIKE THIS.
YOU KNOW WHAT REALLY GETS ME? YOU'RE TOO SELFISH TO SEE I'M DOING ALL THIS FOR YOU.
THEN WHY BOTHER?
ISN'T IT OBVIOUS, YOU ASS?
WE SUPPOSEDLY TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER.
IS LEAVING YOUR WAY OF TAKING CARE OF ME?
UH... SURE.

IS THIS ALL THE LIFE YOU WANT? FIGHTING IN A WORLD THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE, JUST SO YOU CAN PROTECT ME IN WAYS I DON'T NEED?
YES.
WELL, I WANT SOMETHING MORE!
I'M THROUGH BEGGING, JULIE.
I THINK, IF YOU LOOK DEEP INSIDE...
YOU ALREADY KNOW THE RIGHT THING TO DO.
YOU'RE RIGHT, MAXX.
I DO.
BUT I'M THE ONLY ONE...
...STRONG ENOUGH...
...TO DO IT.

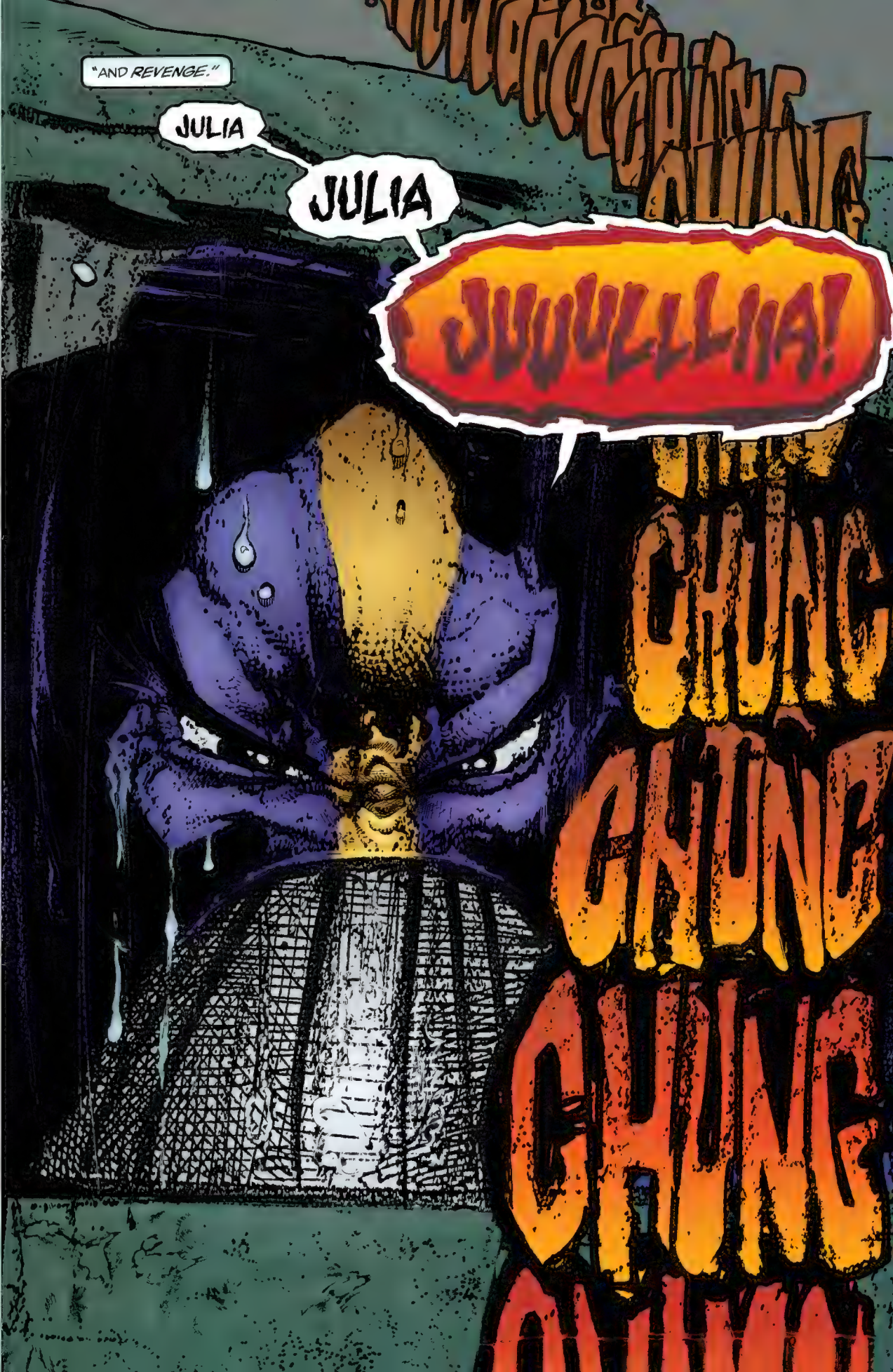
YOU PACKED EVERYTHING?
UH-HUH. IS HE GONNA BE ALL RIGHT?
SURE.
ARE YOU GONNA BE ALL RIGHT?
NO, SARAH.
SLAM!
CAN WE JUST GO, SARAH?
ARE YOU SURE YOU GOT IT ALL?
YOU CAN ALWAYS COME BACK IF YOU NEED TO...

WE-HAUL
WE-HAUL
NO, I CAN'T.

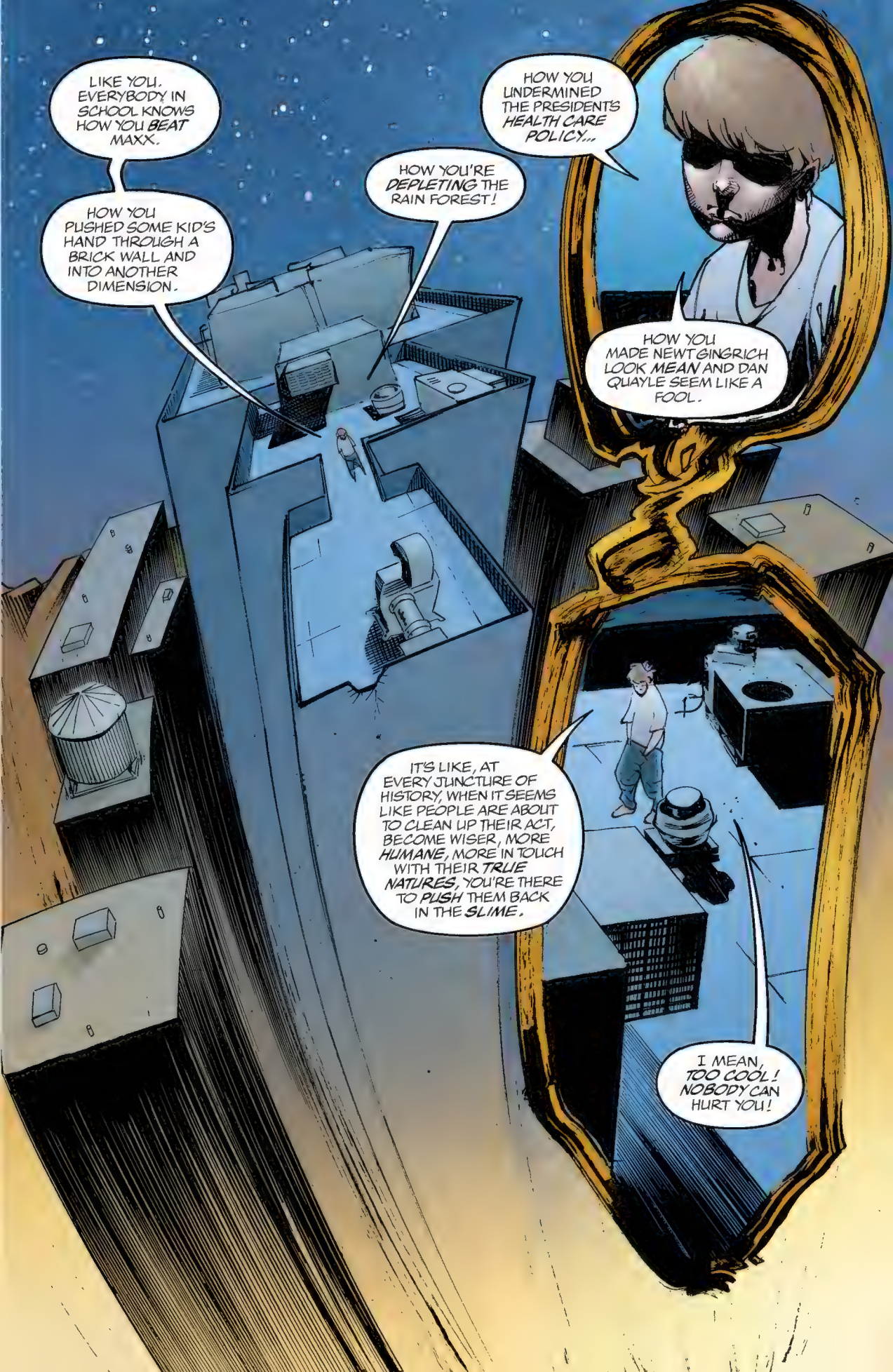
Chapter
Four


"I KNOW WHAT YOU DID.
"SOMEHOW YOU TRICKED JULIE WINTERS INTO GOING AWAY.
"AND WITHOUT HER, THE OUTBACK, WHICH IS A MANIFESTATION OF HER UNCONSCIOUS, *DIED*.
"NOW THE SPIRIT OF THE MAXX ROAMS THIS *RUINED* LAND, WEEPING AND LOST.
"BECAUSE EVERYTHING IN THIS LAND IS DEAD.
?
"DEAD AND ROTTING.

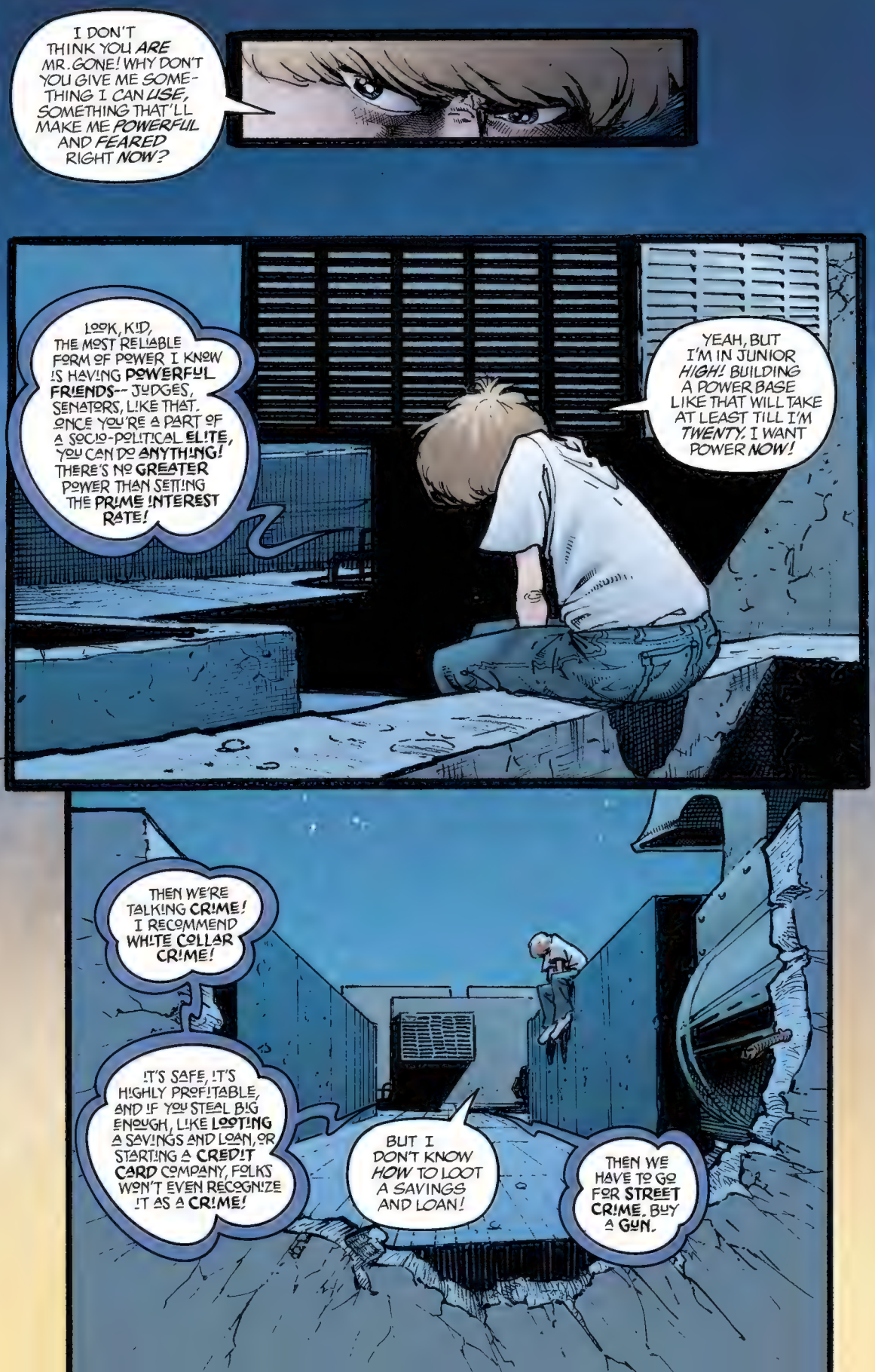
"AND ON THIS PLANE, THE MAXX IS INCAPACITATED WITH LONELINESS AND GRIEF.
"HE'S CRAWLED INTO A HOLE TO MEDITATE ON HIS IMPOTENCE...
"AND SELF-PITY.
"CAUGHT UP IN FORCES HE CAN'T UNDERSTAND...
"HE BROODS ON ANGER...
"RAGE...
3.301
CHUNK CHUNK CHUNK CHUNK CHUNK CHUNK CHUNK
TAG TAG TAG TAG TAG TAG TAG


"AND REVENGE."
JULIA
JULIA
JUUULLIA!
CHUNG
CHUNG
CHUNG

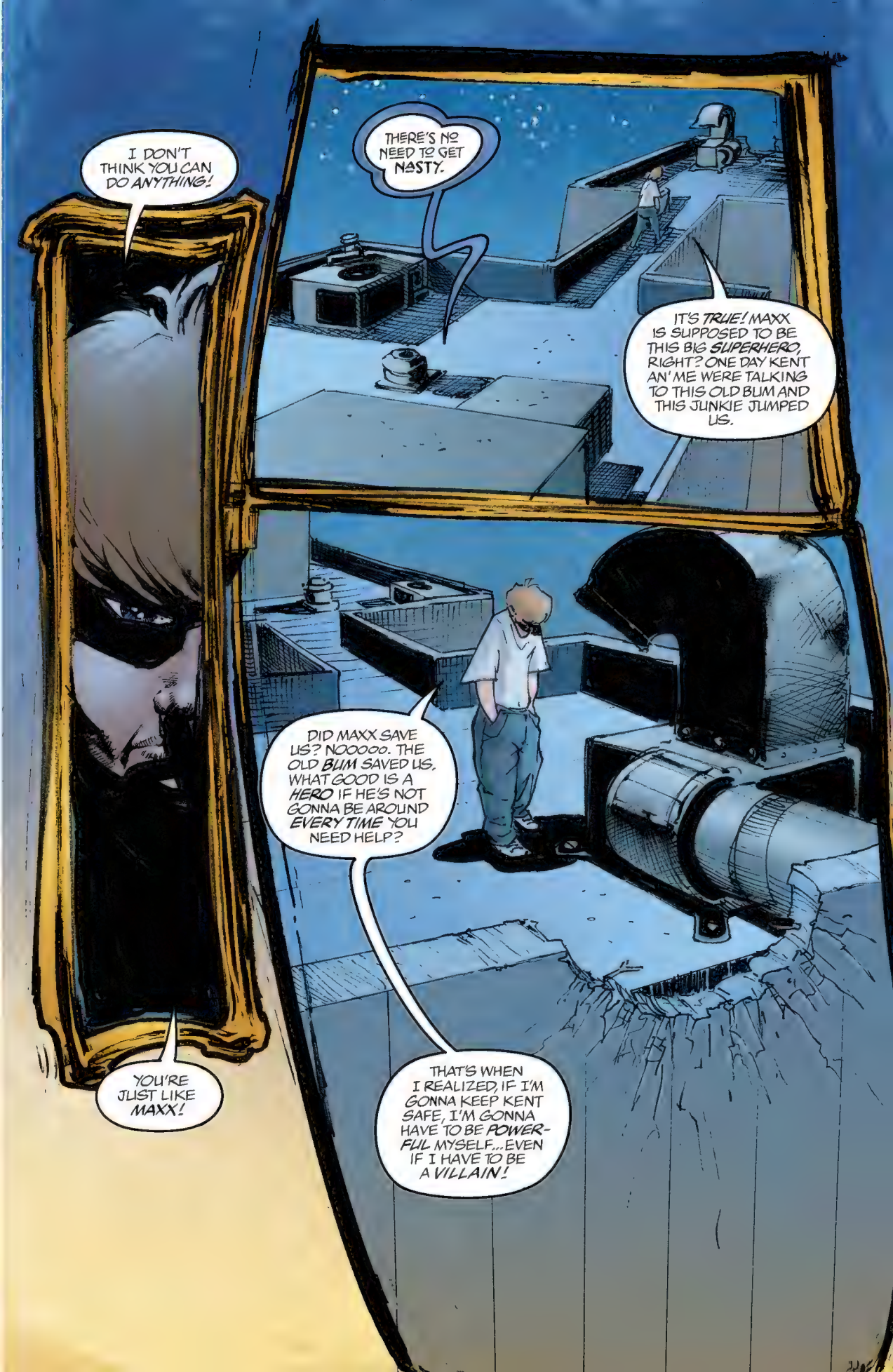
THAT'S A PRETTY COOL SUMMARY OF THE CURRENT SITUATION, KID. BUT HOW DO YOU KNOW ANY OF THAT? I THOUGHT ALL THAT EXTRA-DIMENSIONAL STUFF WAS SUPPOSED TO BE SECRET?
Aww, PRETTY MUCH THAT'S WHAT WE GOSSIP ABOUT IN SCHOOL ALL DAY, THE METAPHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL ROOTS OF EVERYDAY LIFE, AS MANIFESTED THROUGH THE METAPHOR OF SUPER-HEROIC STRUGGLE.
I MEAN, IT'S NOT LIKE WE'RE REALLY GONNA USE GEOGRAPHY OR MATH.
THAT'S WHY I CAME TO FIND YOU TONIGHT. I THINK YOU'RE THE SORCERER MR. GONE.
MY NAME IS HARRY. AND I WANT TO BE POWERFUL AND STRONG.

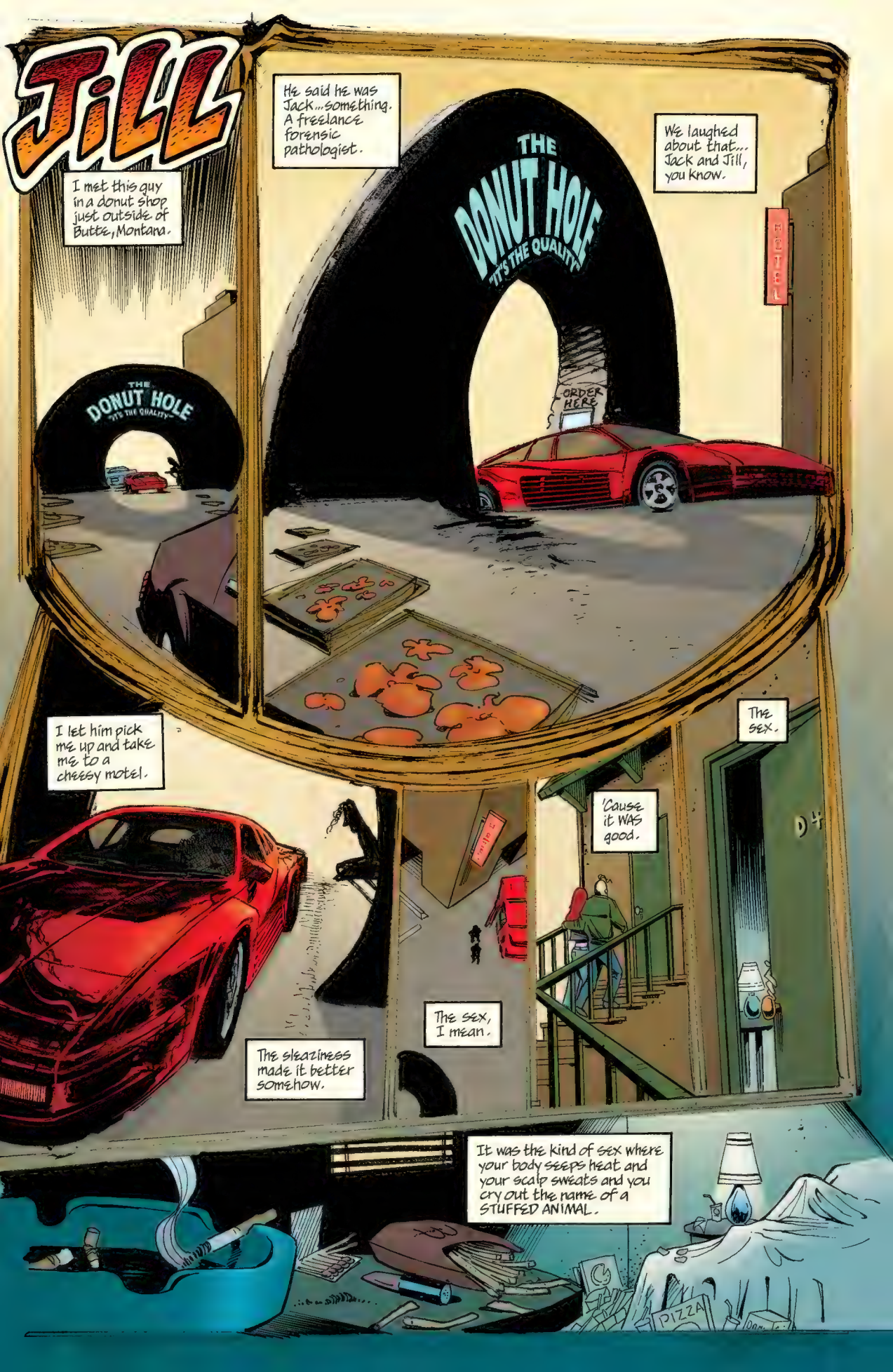

LIKE YOU. EVERYBODY IN SCHOOL KNOWS HOW YOU BEAT MAXX.
HOW YOU PUSHED SOME KID'S HAND THROUGH A BRICK WALL AND INTO ANOTHER DIMENSION.
HOW YOU'RE DEPLETING THE RAIN FOREST!
HOW YOU UNDERMINED THE PRESIDENT'S HEALTH CARE POLICY...
HOW YOU MADE NEWT GINGRICH LOOK MEAN AND DAN QUAYLE SEEM LIKE A FOOL.
IT'S LIKE, AT EVERY JUNCTURE OF HISTORY, WHEN IT SEEMS LIKE PEOPLE ARE ABOUT TO CLEAN UP THEIR ACT, BECOME WISER, MORE HUMANE, MORE IN TOUCH WITH THEIR TRUE NATURES, YOU'RE THERE TO PUSH THEM BACK IN THE SLIME.
I MEAN, TOO COOL! NOBODY CAN HURT YOU!

SO, HOW DO YOU GET POWER? WELL...
I GUESS THE EASIEST WAY IS THROUGH KNOWLEDGE ...MOSTLY SELF-KNOWLEDGE. KNOW YOUR WEAKNESSES AND THE WEAKNESSES OF OTH...
HUH? THAT SUCKS! I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THAT CRAP!
BESIDES, I DON'T HAVE ANY WEAKNESSES.
REALLY? WELL, ME, MAXX, JULIE, AND EVERYONE ELSE ON THE GLOBE DOES HAVE THEM. EVERYONE EXCEPT FOR YOU, OF COURSE... AND THAT IS SOMETHING YOU CAN EXPLOIT.

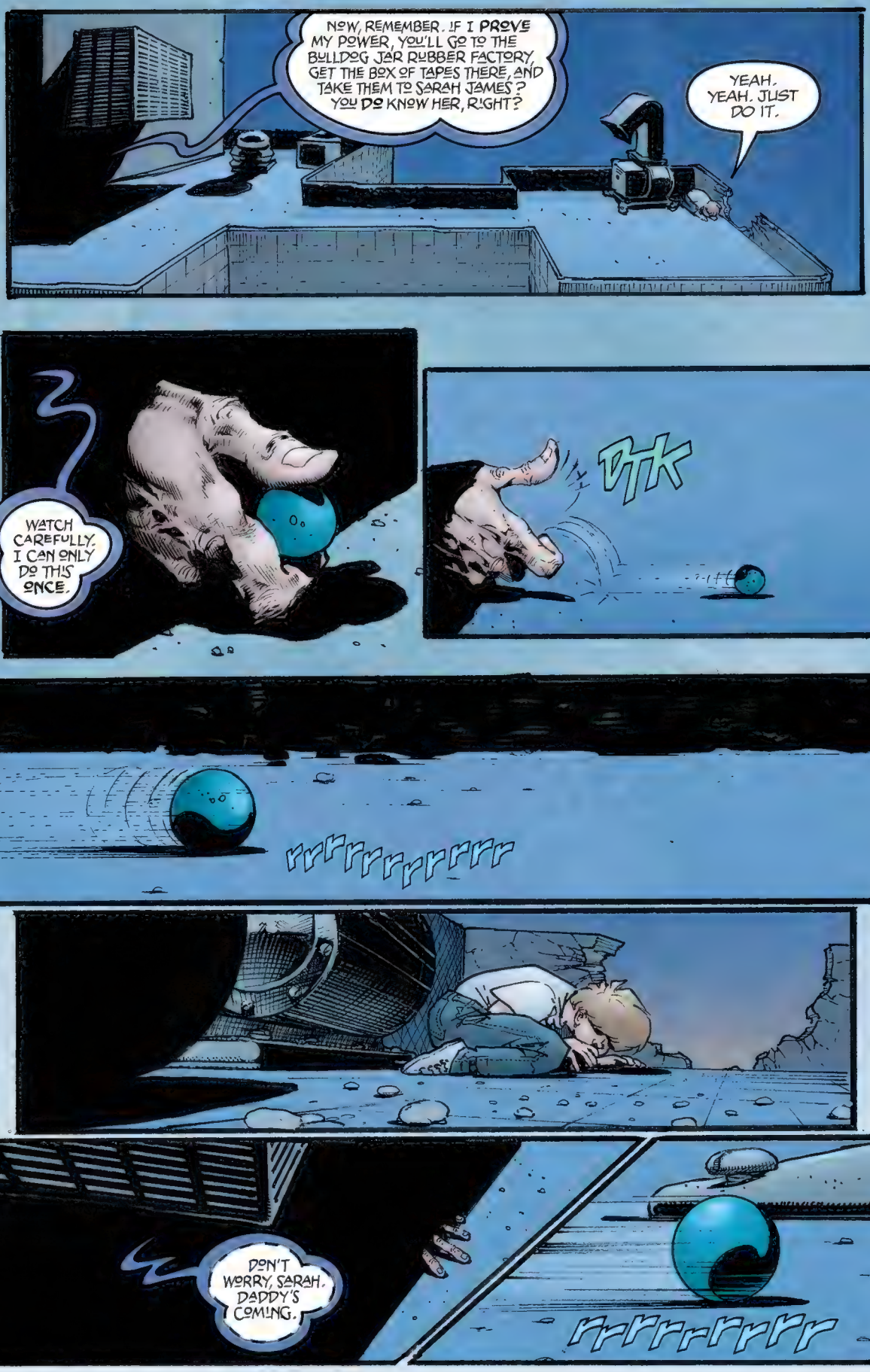

I DON'T THINK YOU *ARE* MR. GONE! WHY DON'T YOU GIVE ME SOMETHING I CAN *USE*, SOMETHING THAT'LL MAKE ME *POWERFUL* AND *FEARED* RIGHT *NOW*?
LOOK, KID, THE MOST RELIABLE FORM OF POWER I KNOW IS HAVING **POWERFUL FRIENDS**-- JUDGES, SENATORS, LIKE THAT. ONCE YOU'RE A PART OF A SOCIO-POLITICAL **ELITE**, YOU CAN DO **ANYTHING**! THERE'S NO **GREATER** POWER THAN SETTING THE **PRIME INTEREST RATE**!
YEAH, BUT I'M IN JUNIOR *HIGH*! BUILDING A POWER BASE LIKE THAT WILL TAKE AT LEAST TILL I'M *TWENTY*. I WANT POWER *NOW*!
THEN WE'RE TALKING **CRIME**! I RECOMMEND **WHITE COLLAR CRIME**!
IT'S SAFE, IT'S HIGHLY PROFITABLE, AND IF YOU STEAL BIG ENOUGH, LIKE **LOOTING** A SAVINGS AND LOAN, OR STARTING A **CREDIT CARD** COMPANY, FOLKS WON'T EVEN RECOGNIZE IT AS A **CRIME**!
BUT I DON'T KNOW *HOW* TO LOOT A SAVINGS AND LOAN!
THEN WE HAVE TO GO FOR **STREET CRIME**. BUY A **GUN**.

A GUN WILL GIVE YOU A LOT OF POWER OVER ANYBODY THAT DOESN'T HAVE A GUN. UNFORTUNATELY, YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST PERSON TO THINK OF THIS.
WITH HALF THE POPULATION PACKING, WE MAY HAVE TO ESCALATE. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT BAZOOKAS?
WHY DON'T YOU JUST GIMME WHAT YOU'RE WEARING?
IT'S OBVIOUSLY A MAGNETIC AURA BOOSTER, FOR PROJECTING YOUR THOUGHT WAVES ONTO PEOPLE AND GETTING CONTROL OF THEIR EMOTIONS.
SNIFF SNIFF
WHAT'S THAT FUNNY SMELL?
S'NOT. IGNORE THE AROMA. CREATURES OF GREAT MAJESTY AND POWER SOMETIMES SMELL.
CLINK!
THIS THING? IT'S A NECK BRACE. IT'S SUPPOSED TO KEEP MY HEAD IN LINE WITH MY SPINE.
IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE IT'S WORKING.

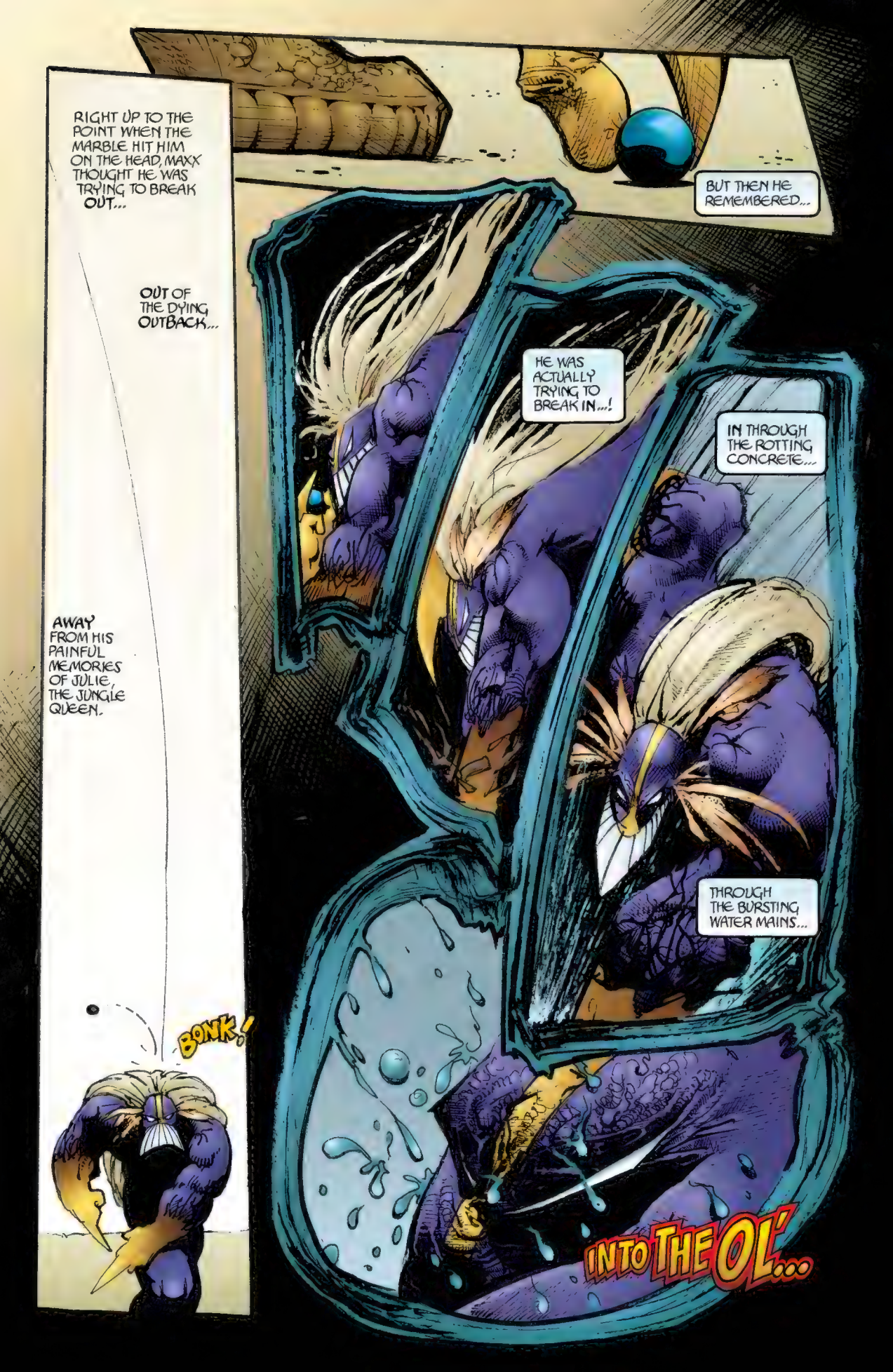

I DON'T THINK YOU CAN DO ANYTHING!
THERE'S NO NEED TO GET NASTY.
IT'S TRUE! MAXX IS SUPPOSED TO BE THIS BIG SUPERHERO, RIGHT? ONE DAY KENT AN' ME WERE TALKING TO THIS OLD BUM AND THIS JUNKIE JUMPED US.
DID MAXX SAVE US? NOOOOO. THE OLD BUM SAVED US, WHAT GOOD IS A HERO IF HE'S NOT GONNA BE AROUND EVERY TIME YOU NEED HELP?
YOU'RE JUST LIKE MAXX!
THAT'S WHEN I REALIZED, IF I'M GONNA KEEP KENT SAFE, I'M GONNA HAVE TO BE POWERFUL MYSELF... EVEN IF I HAVE TO BE A VILLAIN!


JILL
I met this guy in a donut shop just outside of Butte, Montana.
He said he was Jack... something. A freelance forensic pathologist.
We laughed about that... Jack and Jill, you know.
THE DONUT HOLE "IT'S THE QUALITY"
ORDER HERE
MOTEL
I let him pick me up and take me to a cheesy motel.
The sex.
'Cause it WAS good.
The sex, I mean.
The sleaziness made it better somehow.
It was the kind of sex where your body seeps heat and your scalp sweats and you cry out the name of a STUFFED ANIMAL.
PIZZA

Afterwards, when we woke up, Jack seemed different somehow... less playful.
Worried.
Tense.
M&Ms
Of course, it WAS then he realized I took his car.
Yeah. That was probably it.
MILK
BUTTER


NOW, REMEMBER. IF I PROVE MY POWER, YOU'LL GO TO THE BULLDOG JAR RUBBER FACTORY, GET THE BOX OF TAPES THERE, AND TAKE THEM TO SARAH JAMES? YOU DO KNOW HER, RIGHT?
YEAH. YEAH. JUST DO IT.
WATCH CAREFULLY. I CAN ONLY DO THIS ONCE.
PTK
rrrrrrrrrrr
DON'T WORRY, SARAH. DADDY'S COMING.
rrrrrrrrr

WOW!

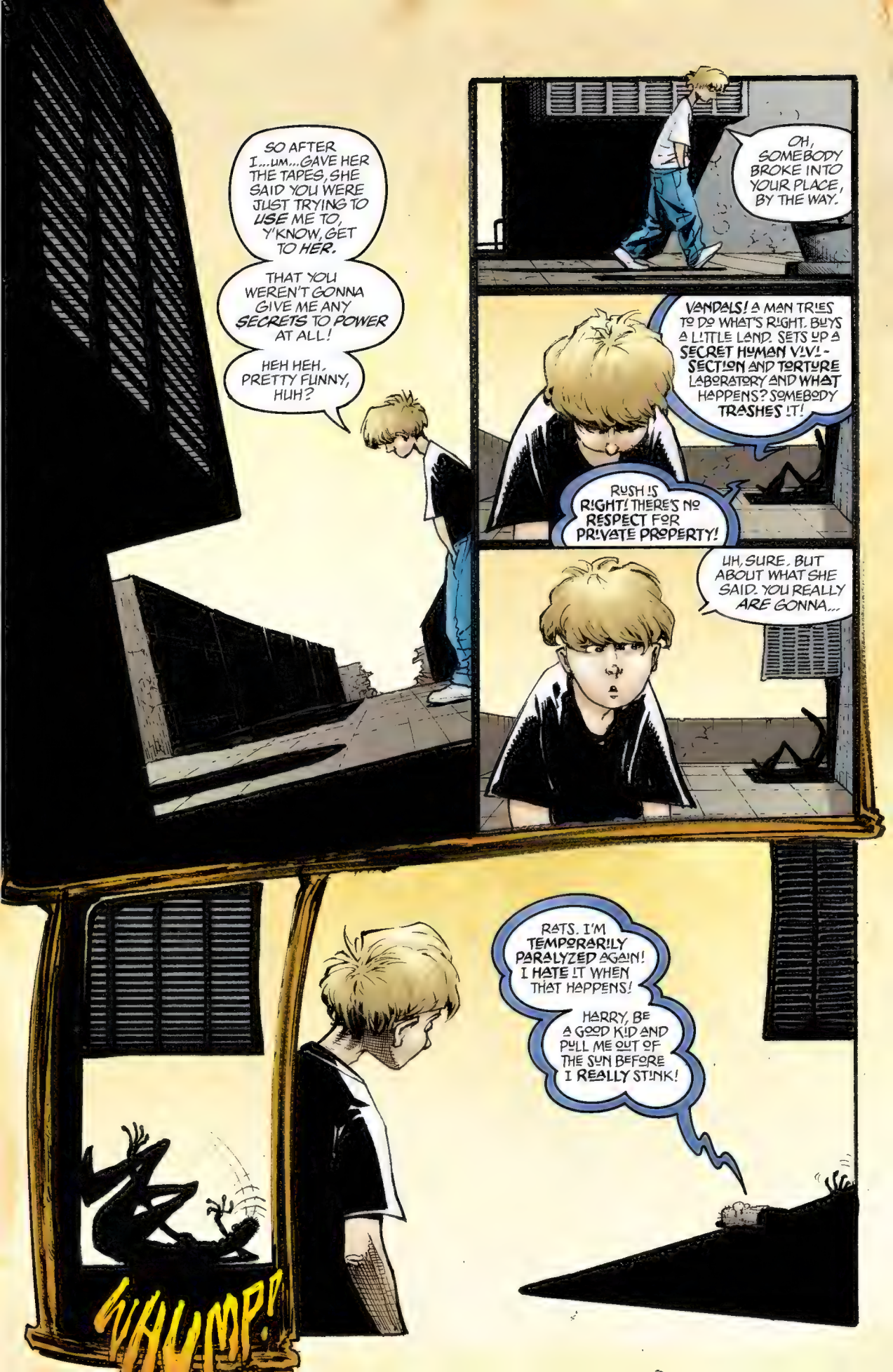

RIGHT UP TO THE POINT WHEN THE MARBLE HIT HIM ON THE HEAD, MAXX THOUGHT HE WAS TRYING TO BREAK OUT...
OUT OF THE DYING OUTBACK...
AWAY FROM HIS PAINFUL MEMORIES OF JULIE, THE JUNGLE QUEEN.
BONK!
BUT THEN HE REMEMBERED...
HE WAS ACTUALLY TRYING TO BREAK IN...!
IN THROUGH THE ROTTING CONCRETE...
THROUGH THE BURSTING WATER MAINS...
INTO THE OL'...

BULL-DOG-JAR-RUBBER-
THIS SIDE UP
GRRSH!
HEADQUARTERS (WITH ATTACHED APARTMENT AND WALK-IN KITCHEN) TO MR. GONE, DEMON PRINCE OF EVIL!
HUH. TAPES...

CLIC
SO, YOU SEE, SARAH... I HAD TO GIVE THAT PURPLE MUD-PUPPY A REAL VILLAIN TO FIGHT OR HIS LIFE WOULD HAVE BEEN MEANINGLESS. SO I CREATED THIS MR. GON--
FRZT
KAAAAGK

DO YOU THINK THESE WIRE-RIMS AND THE STRAIGHTER HAIR MAKE ME LOOK MORE LIKE JULIE, MAXX?
OR IS IT JUST TOTALLY A LOST CAUSE?
AND THERE'S NO POINT LURKING OUTSIDE, MAXX. IT'S NOT LIKE I DON'T KNOW YOU'RE THERE.
SHOOT.
THE STAND
HERE.
THEY'RE FROM YOUR FATHER. I DECIDED NOT TO BURN THEM ALL.
MY FATHER? MR. GONE?!
WAIT, MAXX. I DON'T WANT THESE, MAXX...!
AARGGHGH!
SOMEBODY'S GONNA SUFFER FOR THIS!

SO HERE'S HARRY, WALKING THROUGH THE RAIN, WISHING HE HAD POWER...
STOOPID TAPES WEREN'T THERE. GONE'S GONNA KILL ME...
HARRY!
EVERYBODY AT SCHOOL SAYS YOU'RE MR. GONE'S IDIOT ASSISTANT.
WHAT IF I AM? THAT'S MY BUSINESS!
DON'T HANG WITH GONE!
HE'S TRYING TO FENCE ME IN! TALKING TO MY FRIENDS... SENDING ME TAPES...!
I DON'T CARE WHAT YOU SAY, SARAH! HE'S MY FRIEND AND HE'S TEACHING ME HOW TO RULE THE WORLD! I DON'T CARE WHAT HE DOES TO ME AFTER THAT!
BUT IT'S NOT YOU HE WANTS.


OH, SOMEBODY BROKE INTO YOUR PLACE, BY THE WAY.
VANDALS! A MAN TRIES TO DO WHAT'S RIGHT. BUYS A LITTLE LAND. SETS UP A SECRET HUMAN VIVI-SECTION AND TORTURE LABORATORY AND WHAT HAPPENS? SOMEBODY TRASHES IT!
RUSH IS RIGHT! THERE'S NO RESPECT FOR PRIVATE PROPERTY!
UH, SURE. BUT ABOUT WHAT SHE SAID. YOU REALLY ARE GONNA...
SO AFTER I...UM...GAVE HER THE TAPES, SHE SAID YOU WERE JUST TRYING TO USE ME TO, Y'KNOW, GET TO HER.
THAT YOU WEREN'T GONNA GIVE ME ANY SECRETS TO POWER AT ALL!
HEH HEH. PRETTY FUNNY, HUH?
RATS. I'M TEMPORARILY PARALYZED AGAIN! I HATE IT WHEN THAT HAPPENS!
HARRY, BE A GOOD KID AND PULL ME OUT OF THE SUN BEFORE I REALLY STINK!
THUMP!

SURE, BUT...
YOU AREN'T JUST USING ME...
RIGHT?
OF COURSE I'M USING YOU! EVERYBODY USES EVERYBODY! WHAT PLANET DO YOU THINK YOU'RE ON?
I DON'T HAVE ANY FRIGGIN' POWER SECRETS! YOU FELL FOR THAT? I JUST KNOW WHERE A COUPLE OF THE DIMENSIONAL PORTALS ARE. I MAKE UP THE REST! ONLY AN IDIOT WOULD THINK I'VE GOT REAL SUPER-POWERS!
NOW GROW UP AND DRAG ME OUT OF THE DAMN SUN...!

MY ONE FLAW AS AN ARCH-FIEND WAS ALWAYS AN EXCESS OF CANDOR.
SPLAT!
OUCH.
THE REALLY SAD THING IS THAT DIDN'T KILL ME. IT JUST REALLY, REALLY, REALLY, REALLY, REALLY, REALLY, REALLY HURT.
HI, HARRY. SARAH SAID YOU MIGHT BE IN TROUBLE.
ANYTHING BAD HAPPENING UP HERE?
NO, MAXX. THERE'S NOTHING UP HERE AT ALL.

I STOLE SOME MORE FOOD FOR YOU, JASPER.
THANKS, LINC. AND THANKS FOR NOT TELLING. IF DAD FOUND OUT, HE'D WUP ME GOOD.
JEEZ, IT'S BEEN THREE WEEKS. I'D GIVE ANYTHING NOT TO HAVE MY HAND STUCK IN THIS STUPID DIMENSIONAL PORTAL THING.
ANYTHING? EVEN YOUR NEW BIKE WITH THE GLOW-IN-THE-DARK HANDLEBARS?
SURE. WHY?
AAAAAAA

Art Gallery featuring Sam Kieth

THE MAXX

THE MAXX

HEY KID!
WHAT THE #$%*! ARE YOU LOOKIN' AT?

CLICK...WHRRR... THIS IS A RECORDING...
HIYA, DOC.
I SUPPOSE YOU'RE WONDERING WHY YOU'VE BEEN TIED UP, DRAGGED OUT OF THE MORGUE, CARRIED INTO THE BASEMENT OF THE ABANDONED BULLDOG JAR RUBBER FACTORY, THROUGH A BATHROOM DECORATED IN A COW MOTIF, AND ARE PRESENTLY IN THE DARK, SURROUNDED BY DARK BLUE, CANNABILISTIC HOMUNCULI.
EVERYONE DOES.
MEEP
MEEP
MEEP
MEEP
MEEP

TITLE MAXX #10 PAGE 3
MONTH ARTIST 67%

"LIVE ART AREA" WITHIN DOTTED LINE RECTANGLE. ALL "BLEED ART" EXTENDS TO OUTERMOST SOLID LINE.

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TITLE MAXX 12 MONTH ARTIST MX 12-14 PAGE 14

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